

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT OF FORMAL  
LONG-DISTANCE FOOTPATHS IN GREAT BRITAIN

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines long-distance routes, formal rights of way designed to allow primarily walkers to make extended journeys through attractive areas of British countryside. It traces the idea of the desirability of cross-country footpaths from its origin in the Romantic Era, through the campaigns for national parks and freer access to the uplands, to its embodiment in the Pennine Way proposal, and thence through official reports to its incorporation in legislation in 1949. Thereafter, attention is focussed on the National Parks Commission, whose statutory responsibility it was to plan long-distance routes, and then the Countryside Commission to what is recognised as the conclusion of the programme for new routes in England and Wales. The Countryside Commission for Scotland's programme for long-distance routes is examined from 1967 when legislation allowed the facility to be created in Scotland.

In tracing the history of the idea and documenting developments, policies and programmes for implementing proposals for long-distance routes, specific aspects examined include the cyclical nature of development of the idea, strengths and weaknesses of the legislation, difficulties translating ideas to reality and the selection of specific routes. In addition, ideas tested and confirmed include the fact that the history of long-distance footpaths reflects that of the 20th Century amenity movement in general, that enthusiastic and imaginative individuals in influential positions were of singular importance to the development of the idea and that long-distance routes have attracted attention and interest of the public, Parliament, the media and user-groups disproportionate to their likely use or physical or economic impact: a distinction is drawn between the symbolic importance of the idea and the reality of implementation.

## PREFACE

This study of long-distance routes has been similar in many ways to walking such a path. It has certainly been a long journey and many a time as part of the journey seemed to be nearing completion, like climbing hills on long-distance routes and feeling sure the summit must be near, suddenly a new series of problems has revealed itself and the end of the journey has seemed as far away as ever.

The idea of the study developed while working for a Master's degree at Berkeley. I had examined the American system of National Scenic Trails for a term paper and felt a desire to carry out a systematic study of similar trails in Great Britain. It seemed a legitimate geographical project: to describe and explain the presence, and in some ways what seemed to be the prominence, of long-distance routes in the British recreational system and to assess their importance as part of the cultural landscape of the British countryside.

Just as carrying out an expedition along a long-distance route often requires the support of a variety of people, so in this study there have been several individuals to whom I am particularly grateful for helping me along the way. First and foremost, Professor J.T.Coppock, my supervisor, has shown kindness and understanding. He has taught me a great deal and patiently encouraged and directed me when I was bogged down or wandering off course in the mists of the study.

It was a great experience to meet Tom Stephenson and to discuss my ideas with him - my thanks go to him and to others in the amenity movement, not least Brunsdon Yapp and Francis Ritchie, for taking time to assist me. Officials of the Countryside Commission for England and Wales, particularly Godfrey Phillips and Ray Woolmore, were very helpful, as were my colleagues during an 18-month spell as Project Officer with the Countryside Commission for Scotland - particularly Peter Bickmore, Tom Huxley, John Foster and Jan Fladmark. I spent a period in the middle of my studentship at Edinburgh as Regional Co-ordinator with the U.S. National Park Service Appalachian Trail Project, and I am very grateful to Dave Richie for giving me a unique and invaluable experience as well as the responsibilities of working on such an exciting project. It was particularly useful in giving me an opportunity to look back objectively at the footpath situation in Britain.

Finally, my thanks go to my family for bearing with me and supporting and encouraging me as the journey dragged on. With hindsight I have wished on many occasions that I had completed my thesis as a full-time student. It is so hard to research and write up such a project at the same time as having challenging full-time jobs and a full family life.

DECLARATION I declare that all that follows in this report has been composed by me and that it represents the results of a personal study carried out while enrolled at the University of Edinburgh.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines the development of long-distance paths, or, more properly, long-distance routes, in Great Britain. Long-distance routes are a statutory provision, intended to allow walkers, and in some instances horse riders and cyclists, to make extended journeys on pathways through countryside of particular scenic attraction.

The Pennine Way is the best-known example of a long-distance route, but there are twelve others in Great Britain open or in the final stages of implementation. Together, these total over 2050 miles (3300 km) in length. The shortest route, the Speyside Way in Northern Scotland, approved but not fully implemented, is 60 miles (96 km) in length; the longest, the South-West Peninsula Path, is 515 miles (824 km) in length.

The routes have been planned by the National Parks Commission and the Countryside Commission in the case of England and Wales and by the Countryside Commission for Scotland under the provision of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and the Countryside (Scotland) Act of 1967 respectively. However, a large majority of the routes which have been created have histories stretching back into the first half of this century. In practice, the planning of long-distance routes involves the linking of existing rights of way and the selection of lines for new ways where a right of way does not exist. Routes, planned by a Commission and approved by the appropriate Minister of State, are implemented and maintained by the local planning or highway authorities, which are fully reimbursed by the Exchequer for their expenditure on the paths. This

100% grant aid makes long-distance routes unique.

Creation of a route can involve the clearing or making of paths, the construction of bridges and the carrying out of minor works, as well as remedial work where it is necessary on badly eroded or fragile sections of the route. However, in England and Wales and in Scotland the respective Commissions have always been at pains to stress that the physical impact of a route should be minimal, echoing the sentiments of the amenity groups which developed ideas for long-distance paths in the first place. Generally, then, the actual negotiation of new rights of way has dominated the implementation of a new route, with signposting, waymarking and the occasional provision of stiles, footbridges or other facilities, including youth hostels, and the publishing of information also undertaken.

This study set out to explain why long-distance routes seemed to be such a prominent feature in the countryside of Great Britain, so far as public interest, attention from the media and official recognition were concerned. A number of themes were pursued; some proved particularly interesting and significant, others were not developed.

One idea had been to examine the use of the long-distance routes to assess their importance as recreational facilities and the physical and economic impact of their use. A pilot survey of several routes in England and Wales, undertaken by the present writer in the summer of 1976, resulted in the conclusion that long-distance routes were used by very small numbers of long-distance walkers or riders (taken to be individuals walking or riding all or a substantial part of a route in one journey). On most routes there were days when no long-distance walker or rider began a journey along the route, and weeks in the summer-time when 12 or less long-distance walkers were encountered on a route. An exception to this was the Pennine Way, where numbers were



considerably higher (on average 20 to 40 individuals began a long-distance walk each day in the summer and at other holiday times). However, the Pennine Way had already had a number of surveys, including a fairly sophisticated one organised by the Countryside Commission<sup>1</sup> and the results from the pilot survey seemed to confirm the results of these. Even on the Pennine Way, use by long-distance walkers was very small compared with use of parts of the route by day-walkers, a pattern evident on all the routes (but most pronounced on the coastal routes).

It was therefore concluded that the physical and economic impact of routes caused by long-distance walkers and riders was very small. Very few facilities, most of them on the Pennine Way, relied on long-distance walkers for the bulk of their trade, and very few problems of wear and tear could be attributed to long-distance walkers or riders. That there were still, in the mid-1970s, some remoter parts of the Pennine Way where a path had not yet been worn on the ground seems to illustrate the lack of impact by long-distance walkers or riders on long-distance routes. Of course, it is likely that many day-walkers, who do cause localised problems of erosion to a greater or lesser degree on all long-distance routes, are attracted to a long-distance route because it is a designated and named route, but this aspect of the study was not pursued.

This relatively small amount of use of long-distance routes for long-distance walking or riding made the fact that the routes seemed to attract disproportionate attention from a wide variety of quarters so much more interesting, and this was one of the themes which was developed - the symbolic importance of long-distance routes.

A further area which was not followed beyond an initial appraisal was the idea that there were international parallels in the

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<sup>1</sup> Countryside Commission Pennine Way Survey (n.d.-1972) HMSO.

development of long-distance paths. A large number of countries have long-distance trails as a component of their national recreational system. Initially, a hypothesis was made that the development of the facility often followed a similar pattern, briefly, that a long-distance path was the idea of an individual, a visionary with philanthropic reasons for his idea; the idea was adopted and developed by an amenity group; other similar ideas were put forward and routes eventually became institutionalised and included in a national planning framework, to be largely controlled by public agencies but with continuing input from amenity groups. The cycle was complete when saturation point was reached, with the demand having been satisfied and the programme to develop routes came to an end. It soon became apparent that, while superficially this model reflected what has taken place in England and Wales and in the USA, there were major dissimilarities between the systems and between these and patterns which emerged in other countries, particularly in Europe. An international comparison was therefore not developed, although the idea of the cyclical model was considered as a useful way of summarising the history of long-distance routes in England and Wales.

This study traces the origins and development of long-distance routes in England and Wales and in Scotland. It concentrates mainly on the idea of the provision and its adoption by amenity groups and then by government as part of the national framework for the provision of recreation. It examines procedural developments, looking at problems and opportunities in the planning and implementing of specific routes rather than describing routes. Locations and descriptions are only given when they illustrate a general point, for description and maps of long-distance routes are readily available, in publications such as Long Distance Paths of England and Wales, the 1 T.G. Miller 1974 David & Charles.

HMSO Series of Long Distance Path Guides, the Automobile Association's No Through Road and many other books on individual routes.

Various themes which are examined include the apparent crucial importance of individuals in the history of the development of the idea of long-distance routes in general and of specific routes in particular; the importance of chance; the general appeal of the concept of long-distance routes throughout their history; the selection of routes and the development of criteria and a programme for their planning; and responses to the difficulties which soon became apparent in the transforming of the idea of having long-distance routes into a workable system in the change from the ideal to a practicality.

Examination of the observation that the interest and attention of the public, the media and official bodies was greatly disproportionate to the actual use of routes for long-distance walks or rides was carried out. Finally, it was recognised that the history of long-distance routes could provide a useful focus for surveying the general history of the amenity movement in Great Britain, reflecting the interests, aspirations, problems and achievements of the different periods of the development and institutionalisation of the movement.

Chapter 2 of the study traces the origins of the idea of long-distance paths in the developing attitude to the countryside of Great Britain, through the Romantic era, the Victorian period and into the inter-war years of the 20th Century. The role of the idea in the movements to conserve and to use the countryside as a recreational resource is assessed. Chapter 3 examines in detail the idea of the Pennine Way and its early development, and Chapter 4 looks at the



formalisation of the idea of long-distance paths between 1939 and 1947, focussing on the attention given to long-distance paths in the increasing interest shown by government in matters of amenity. Chapter 5 examines the pressures leading up to the eventual adoption by the government of a measure to include provision for national parks, improved access to the countryside and long-distance routes in England and Wales, and its passage through Parliament.

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 gave responsibilities for planning long-distance routes to the new National Parks Commission, and Chapters 6, 7 and 8 follow developments relating to long-distance routes during three phases of the life of the Commission - the early years (1950 - 54), the middle years (1955 - 1963) and the final years (1964 - 1968). The Commission's programme for long-distance routes is examined in detail and progress with specific routes is reviewed. The Countryside Act of 1968 transferred responsibility for long-distance routes to the new Countryside Commission, and Chapters 9 and 10 examine long-distance routes in England and Wales in the period 1968 - 1983. Chapter 9 looks at developments affecting the Commission's programme for long-distance routes, and Chapter 10 examines progress with specific routes.

The Countryside(Scotland)Act of 1967 provided for the creation of long-distance routes in Scotland for the first time, and Chapter 11 follows the adoption of the legislation and the Countryside Commission for Scotland's programme for long-distance routes up to the early 1980s.

The study sets out to give a balanced history of the development of long-distance paths in Great Britain and a wide variety of sources are used. In the different parts of the study, different emphasis is put on the different sources. For example, in Chapter 4, stress is laid

on the government papers of the 1940s available at the Public Records Office, while 'Hansards' are central to Chapter 5 and the papers of the various Commissions are the focus of much of Chapters 6 to 11. Principal sources of information include published material such as the journals and books produced for countryside users throughout the twentieth century; newspaper articles (with particular reference to The Times); the wide variety of government papers, including reports of debates, published reports and the unpublished files of the 1940s; the published reports and unpublished minutes, papers and reports of the National Parks Commission, the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Commission for Scotland; published and unpublished records of the amenity groups; correspondence, interviews<sup>and</sup> personal recollections of individuals, such as Commissioners, and various officials; and some field work.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE ORIGINS OF THE IDEA OF LONG-DISTANCE PATHS IN THE DEVELOPING ATTITUDES TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the growth of the movement to increase public enjoyment of the countryside of Great Britain and developments which took place up to the outbreak of the Second World War, as a background to the inception and adoption of the idea of formal long-distance paths. It recognises two distinct elements in this, the 'amenity movement'. The first was represented largely by an elite group of professionals, carrying on the tradition of the Romantics and working for the preservation of the countryside and its facilities. The second was a popular campaign, which can be characterised as the 'user lobby', and a main objective of this was to increase public access to the countryside in general and the uncultivated uplands in particular. Groups were formed to foster aims within the movement, for example, the Commons Society as part of the preservation campaign, and the later Ramblers Association as part of the 'user lobby'.

While the two parts of the movement were separate, several of their objectives and some of their leaders were common to both throughout the period. However, following the Addison Committee on National Parks at the beginning of the 1930s, seen as a major landmark in the history of the amenity movement, the campaign for free access to the uncultivated uplands became more political and extreme in nature. Despite the fact that the militant part of the movement was a small proportion of the total and was very localised, it did attract



disproportionate attention and exerted disproportionate importance. However, it achieved little of direct significance, and the passing of an Access to Mountains Act in 1939, paradoxically, represented a failure of the campaign for free access.

These developments are reviewed in this and the next chapter. They illustrate the importance of the failures as well as the successes of the movement, the importance of personalities and geographical areas of interest, the relationship with the government and the importance of timing in events which together account for the significance of the idea of long-distance footpaths by the end of the inter-war period, immediately before the formalisation of ideas for the development and preservation of the countryside in legislation.

The chapter begins with an examination of the remarkable changes in attitude towards the countryside preceding the development of the amenity movement, "a result of one of the most profound revolutions in thought that has ever occurred."<sup>1</sup> This provides a foundation for an understanding of subsequent developments and is, indeed, fundamental to an understanding of attitudes to, and pressures on, the countryside in the 20th Century. The roots of the idea of creating opportunities for long-distance walks across the countryside of Great Britain can clearly be seen in this 'revolution'.

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Hope Nicholson Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory 1959 Ithaca, NY.

## 2.MOUNTAIN GLOOM AND MOUNTAIN GLORY

Durst I expostulate with Providence  
I then should ask, wherein the innocence  
Of my poor undersigning infancy,  
Could Heaven offend to such a black degree,  
As for th'offence to damn me to a place  
Where Nature only suffers in disgrace,  
A Country so deform'd, the Traveller  
Would swear those parts Nature's pudenda were  
Like Warts and Wens, hills on one side swell,  
To all but Natives inaccessible;  
Th'other a blue scrofulous scum defiles,  
Flowing from th'earth's impostumated boyles;  
That seems the steps (Mountain on Mountain thrown)  
By which the Giants storm'd the Thunderer's throne,  
This from that prospect seems the sulph'rous flood,  
Where sinful Sodom and Gomorrah stood.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Charles Cotton in the second half of the seventeenth century about the hills and moorlands of the Peak District, epitomising the contemporary attitude to uplands. People rarely left the valleys and towns to venture into such wildernesses by choice.

Some 250 years later the citizens of Manchester and Sheffield fought battles to get access to the most remote and wild parts of the Peak District. To such people, these were the ideal places to spend their precious leisure time. Rallies were held in the moors, attracting thousands, and the campaign for the right to roam in these wild areas became a significant political force.

At this same time, the 1920s and 1930s the same area was to provide the starting point for an idea which caught the imagination of the country, to create a continuous path seeking out the wildest and highest and loneliest parts of the Pennines, on which one could hike, at one with nature, from the Peak District to the Scottish border - for pleasure. This Pennine Way epitomised the new attitudes to the wilder countryside, and it was, in Great Britain, the pioneer of the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cotton 'The Wonders of the Peake' lines 1-16 in J.Buxton (ed) The Poems of Charles Cotton 1958 Routledge & Kegan Paul, p52.

idea of formal long distance footpaths - the subject of this study.

This change in attitudes towards the countryside and towards uplands in particular, from abhorrence to virtual worship, is a remarkable transformation and has a profound and lasting effect to this day, influencing leisure patterns in Great Britain and, indeed, in the Western World.

To John Donne in 1611 Mountains were "Warts and pock-holes in the case of the earth," while in the middle of the seventeenth century Andrew Marvell saw mountains as "excesence ill-designed....that do with your hook-shoulder'd height The Earth deform and heaven fright." Cotton, as has been seen, depicted the uplands of the Peak District as "a country so deformed...like Warts and Wens, the Earth's impostumated boyles...." These were typical of descriptions of upland scenery before the eighteenth century.

However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century a romantic image of mountain scenery in poetry revealed a complete change of attitude. Lord Byron echoed the sentiments of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats - "Are not the Mountains, waves and skies a part of me and my soul as I of them?", as did Ruskin: "To myself, mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery."

Marjorie Hope Nicholson, in her Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory<sup>1</sup> (coining phrases used by Ruskin), narrowed this change in attitude to a period of just fifty years at the beginning of the eighteenth century. She argued that it happened because of the challenging of religious dogma which led to a release from the stranglehold of an exclusively biblical explanation of nature, an explanation which had degraded mountains.

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<sup>1</sup> op.cit.



The traditional explanation of mountains and rugged scenery was 'The Theory of the Mundane Egg', as set out in 1681 by an English clergyman, Thomas Burnet. God had made the earth like an egg, its surface smooth and regular - the Garden of Eden for those who inhabited it. However, because men lived to great ages, they had a considerable amount of leisure time and this they turned to evil use. The divine retribution was to shatter the egg-like surface of the antediluvian world, causing the Flood, which left behind the piles of shattered fragments of the broken shell - the mountains of today.

"We have still the broken materials of that first world and walk upon its ruins; while it stood, there was the seat of paradise and the scene of the golden age: when it fell it made the deluge; and this unshapen earth we now inhabit," concluded Burnet.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Burnet attempted to apply the new-found scientific reasoning of the seventeenth century to strengthen the biblical explanation of the world, and the more involved he became, the more the absurdity of his reasoning was apparent. The second half of the seventeenth century was the beginning of a period of questioning and challenging, and many traditional answers and explanations soon began to crumble and be rejected - including this explanation of mountains. Writers and thinkers "conditioned by their classical and biblical heritage... living in a limited circumscribed universe"<sup>2</sup> suddenly found their horizons dramatically extended. An appreciation of the value of the diversity of the world developed, and, as a consequence, the latter part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw mountains beginning to be considered an essential part of a world all the more wonderful because of its diversity.

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1 Thomas Burnet Sacred Theory of the Earth... 1753 edition London, pp ix-x.  
2 Nicholson op.cit. p71.

Contemporary and intertwined with this was an opening-up of the world in a geographical sense, characterised by the European Grand Tour (which began to include the Alps) but evident as well in the accounts of travels within Great Britain. Familiarity with the uplands and improved conditions of safety and travel also affected attitudes to the wilder parts of the countryside.

Daniel Defoe visited the Peak District in the 1720s and described his journey over the moors which Cotton had depicted fifty or sixty years previously as follows:

"Upon the top of that mountain begins a vast extended moor or waste, which, for 15 or 16 miles together due north presents you with neither hedge, home or tree, but a waste and howling wilderness, over which when strangers travel, they are obliged to take guides, or it would be next to impossible not to lose their way... Nothing can be more surprising of its kind, than for a stranger coming from the north... wandering or labouring to pass this difficult dessart country, and seeing no end to it, and almost discouraged and beaten out with the fatigue of it, (just such was our case) on a sudden the guide brings him to this precipice, where he looks down from a frightful height, and a comfortless, barren, and, as he thought, endless moor, into the most delightful valley."<sup>1</sup>

The hostility of the moors which Defoe experienced and described was a genuine feeling derived from his first-hand experience of an area newly-opened up for travellers. It is possible to detect the influence of past attitudes to such areas, but there is no evidence that Defoe considered himself to be in a place which epitomised the Fall of Man.

The feeling of sublimity was still to come, although, in fact, Kenneth Clark has suggested that it was at this very time - the 1720s - when the void left by the rejection of Christianity in England was suddenly filled by the worship of 'nature',<sup>2</sup> by which was meant the sensations of the world. By the 1760s, Jean Jacques Rousseau became the chief priest of this new-found 'religion', and by the end of the

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Defoe A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1974 ed J.M.Dent & Sons, pl76.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Clark Civilisation 1971 BBC/John Murray, p271.



century the Romantic poets were beginning to spread the word. "The Romantic poets no longer needed to argue and debate philosophical theories of either space or time. They were the natural heirs to their tradition of infinity and eternity. The sense of vastness of nature that had once appalled has become a part of their goodly heritage," concluded Nicholson.<sup>1</sup> The recognition of the 'aesthetics of the infinite'<sup>2</sup> began to transform attitudes to upland areas, which eventually became revered by some as representing all that was noble in nature.

Moreover, as well as discovering the pleasures to be felt in seeing wild landscapes, the new faithful found walking to be one of the most important acts of worship. Rousseau recognised this in his Reveries of a Solitary Walker and, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, walking in the countryside was rapidly becoming the spiritual exercise of intellectuals, philosophers and poets - exemplified by William Wordsworth.

There was a nearly complete reversal of attitudes to the countryside and to walking for pleasure in the century following this. The new delights in rambling and in exploring mountains and moorlands gradually gained acceptance throughout society and from this sprang the idea of formal long-distance paths on which ordinary people could explore the countryside.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson op.cit. p381.

<sup>2</sup> the subtitle of Nicholson's book.



### 3. DEVELOPMENTS TO THE 1920s

#### (a) The Movement to Preserve the Amenity of the Countryside-

##### The Wordsworth Tradition

The works of Wordsworth, dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century, were to be especially influential in developing a love of the countryside, and mountain areas in particular, in the English-speaking world. In fact, Wordsworth helped save the era of 'Mountain Glory' from becoming a passing, introverted fashion.

Descriptions and paintings of rugged scenery around 1800 were after as stereotyped and divorced from reality as they had been before the transformation of attitudes to mountains. Jane Austen captured this in Sense and Sensibility (1797):

Edward: You must not inquire too far, Marianne - remember, I have no knowledge of the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste, if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight which ought to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere.

Marianne: It is very true ... that admiration of landscape scenery is become mere jargon. Everyone pretends to feel and tries to describe with taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was.<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth detested this insincerity and he emphasised the importance of the direct experiencing of actual upland areas and communing with nature. His mountains were real:

"Their forms are endlessly diversified, sweeping easily or boldly in simple majesty, abrupt and precipitous, or soft and elegant"<sup>2</sup>

He popularised a genuine feeling for nature, encouraging the development of a fashion for walking and for spending holidays in the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by W.M.Merchant in Introduction to Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes 1951, p9.

<sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth A Guide through the District of the Lakes 5th edition, Kendal 1835, p8.

countryside. He can also be credited for the first pleas for the preservation of a countryside area for its aesthetic value. In his Guide through the District of the Lakes he discussed the desire that the area remain unspoilt, adding:

"In this wish the author will be joined by persons of pure taste throughout the whole island, who, by their visits (often repeated) to the Lakes in the North of England, testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and an interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy."<sup>1</sup>

(b) The Commons Society

The idea of the countryside being the heritage of all, fundamental to land-use policy and planning for recreation from the mid-twentieth century, was slowly accepted by disciples of Wordsworth and a few social reformers and liberals of the Victorian era. Early manifestations of the development of the idea were largely centred around the problems caused by urbanisation and the growth of slums and inner-city squalor in this period of unprecedented industrialisation in Great Britain. Campaigns such as the movement for garden cities and societies such as the Kyrle Society, founded by Octavia Hill to bring objects and places of beauty within easy reach of the poor, illustrate this.

One of the first such societies, and one which for several decades was to be at the centre of developments in the preservation of open spaces and the heritage of the countryside, was founded in 1865 when a group of liberals, organised by George Shaw-Lefevre (later Lord Eversley), formed a society to fight the enclosure of common land around London. This was the Commons Society.

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1. ibid. p88.



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The Commons Society met with considerable success pressing for legislation to control the enclosure of commons and fighting individual battles to save the commons around the capital city, such as Hampstead Heath, the first to be protected by the Society's efforts in the 1860s, and Epping Forest, formally opened to the public by Queen Victoria in 1882. It worked closely with the Corporation of the City of London, and was influential within Parliament and well-equipped to fight law cases. Furthermore, it achieved considerable publicity for the open-air cause through its campaigns.

Following its successes around London, the Society extended its horizons, helping to protect the Ashdown Forest, the Malvern Hills and the New Forest by the end of the century. Also at the very end of the century (1899) it combined with the Footpath Preservation Society, a small organisation with similar ideals which had been formed in 1893.

In arguing for the preservation of common land, the Commons Society had been concerned with its value for public recreation, maintaining that, although economic circumstances had changed and traditional uses of commons as sources of food and firewood were no longer of importance, the new value of such areas for recreation made it critical that they be maintained. A similar argument was extended for preserving footpaths - the traditional role of some footpaths may no longer be of much importance, but the needs and demands of an urbanised population made it essential that a network of rights of way as a recreational resource should not be lost. From 1899 onwards, footpath matters became an increasingly large part of the Society's

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1 For its history see Lord Eversley Commons, Forests and Footpaths... 1910, Cassel & Co, and W.H. Williams The Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society 1865-1965 - A Short History of the Society and its Work 1965 The Commons Society.



work, as illustrated by the claim in the first volume of the Society's Journal (1927) that 2000 cases concerning footpath matters were examined each year (at a cost to the Society of some £3,000) and that two hundred miles (320 km) of rural walks were saved annually. As a result of this change it took the name 'Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society' in 1910. However, throughout this study it is referred to as 'the Commons Society'.<sup>1</sup>

The Society was also closely associated with a series of Access to Mountains Bills, aimed at increasing public access to uncultivated uplands. This part of the campaign will be examined later.

Much of this activity would seem to be akin to that of the open-air movement. However, the Society was not a 'user group', and it continued to be essentially a small band of influential and mainly upper-class philanthropists, with popular support never being developed. It nevertheless illustrates the close ties between the aspirations of the different parts of the amenity movement.

The Society was also indirectly concerned with the preservation of areas for their scenic amenity and a number of its leading members played prominent parts in the campaign for the establishment of national parks.

As has been seen, Wordsworth and his disciples - who included some of the early members of the Commons Society - were involved in fostering a love and a valuing of open air and natural beauty, leading to a preservation of facilities for the public enjoyment of the countryside. They were also influential in pressing for the preservation of areas of outstanding natural beauty for aesthetic reasons. The Lake District was a continuing focus of attention, and

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<sup>1</sup> It has recently become The Open Spaces Society.

concern over the gradual encroachment of development into parts of the area led to the establishment of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty towards the end of the century, formed by prominent members of the Commons Society (Octavia Hill and Canon Rawsley, for example). One of the main reasons a separate organisation was formed was because the Commons Society could not under its rules hold land.

Although the preservation of beauty spots in the Lake District was one of the main reasons for its establishment, the National Trust soon acquired properties throughout the country and came to the fore in the preservation campaign in many areas. In addition, other preservation societies were formed in a number of areas, such as Dartmoor and later the Forest of Dean and Cannock Chase, and these local societies were pledged to protect the countryside from despoilation and to open it up for public enjoyment.

These groups continued to be important and influential throughout the first half of the twentieth century and their focussing of attention on areas of the countryside presumably accounted in part for the increased numbers of visitors to the countryside. This in turn generated demands for more facilities to enable the countryside to be enjoyed, and the recognition of the opportunities provided by the developing of footpaths, including long-distance ones. The central position of the Commons Society in this has been clearly seen.

#### (c) The Growth of Rambling

Paralleling the moves to preserve the amenity of the countryside was the growth in its use for recreation and notably the growth of rambling. The fashion of walking in the countryside was spreading slowly from the artists of the Romantic period to academics and other



professionals, and by the end of the nineteenth century small numbers of skilled artisans were indulging in the pastime.

Tom Stephenson, in fact, has added a further dimension to this general pattern of rambling and appreciation of the countryside spreading from the upper classes to the working classes at the end of the nineteenth century. He has recognised groups with high proportions of working-class members organising themselves to oppose footpath closures much earlier in the century, such as the York Footpath Society (1824) and the Manchester Society for the Preservation of Ancient Footpaths (1826), founded to fight footpath closures in the Flixton area. He has also pointed to the tradition, particularly in Lancashire and other northern counties, for members of the working class to band together in self-improvement and natural history societies, some of which date from the late eighteenth century. He has recognised the roots of the Ramblers Association as being in groups such as these.<sup>1</sup>

Rambling clubs first appeared in the 1880s with the Manchester YMCA Rambling Club and the Forest Ramblers examples. These tended at first to be middle class in composition and the latter and others, like the Homeland Rambling Club, had close ties with the Commons Society. The majority of the first clubs were in the London area and in 1901 the Federation of London Rambling Clubs was formed.

The campaign to preserve the commons had, in part, been to give those working in the cities the opportunities to get into the fresh air and there were moves to encourage walking for pleasure among the working people. A prime example of this came from the northern industrial town of Colne in Lancashire. In the early 1890s, the Congregational Minister in Colne was T.A. Leonard, who had been

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<sup>1</sup> see Rucksack (Journal of the Ramblers Association) vol 9,1, Summer 1977, p8.



influenced by visits to Germany where rambling was already a very popular pastime and by the socialist ideas of the principal of his theology college, Dr.J.D.Paton. Leonard enjoyed walking and, dismayed at what he saw as the futility of the hard-earned week's holiday of the mill-workers spent on the beaches of Blackpool, he attempted to extend the middle-class recreation of walking for pleasure to one which would be enjoyed by the workers. Accordingly, he took the men in his bible class, who were mainly weavers, for walks in the countryside around Colne and then in 1892 he took a group of twenty men on a walking holiday in the Lake District. The experiment was a success and, in subsequent years, encouraged by Paton, Leonard took groups to the Lake District and to North Wales and gradually a number of guest houses were acquired. In 1910 the guest houses were incorporated into the Co-operative Holidays Association (CHA) and in 1913 Leonard founded the Holiday Fellowship on similar lines.<sup>1</sup>

These organisations were also to have a most important role in the campaign for preservation of and access to the countryside and Leonard himself, commonly referred to as 'The Founder of the Open Air Movement', later featured prominently in the founding of the Youth Hostels Association (YHA), the Ramblers Association and the Pennine Way Association.

A further development in the history of walking for pleasure during this period was that special endurance walks were being devised over the hills and moors, predominantly in the north, such as the Edale to Marsden Walk, founded in 1902, and the 70 mile Colne to

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<sup>1</sup> Over the Hills the Magazine of the Holiday Fellowship, New Year 1949, pp2-3. See also T.A.Leonard Adventures in Holidaymaking Holiday Fellowship, Conway, 1934.

<sup>1</sup>  
Rawsley Walk. The idea of these named walks, albeit designed to be tackled as 24 hour hikes, probably influenced the later development of ideas for formal long-distance walks to be tackled over a period of more than one day.

Elsewhere in the north, hikers were organising themselves, predominantly on socialistic and non-conformist lines. In Sheffield, for example, the Clarion Rambling Club was founded in 1900 with the motto "a Rambler made is a man improved". It was, however, the years following the First World War which saw the most dramatic changes. Ramblers' Federations in Liverpool (1922), Manchester and District (1923) and Sheffield and District (1926) joined the earlier Federation formed in London.

Some of the hikers' groups were becoming more demonstratively political by the mid-1920s, again particularly in the north. As early as 1926, a rally was held at Winnats, near Castleton in Derbyshire, to press for freer access to the uncultivated uplands of the Peak District. This was organised by the Manchester Federation, but subsequent rallies were organised by the more militant Sheffield Federation, and by 1929 over 8000 people were attracted to the annual Winnats Rally, and the main focus had become the restrictions in the area of Kinder Scout.

The impact of the political developments was to take on more significance in the 1930s and it is examined later. However, the vast majority of hikers in the 1920s (and indeed in the 1930s) were apolitical and restrictions on walkers in most parts of the country

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<sup>1</sup> See E.Byne & G.Sutton The High Peak : The Story of Walking and Climbing in the Peak District 1966, Secker & Warburg.

were minimal. Stephen Graham was able to write of The Gentle Art of Tramping in 1926 (in a book still widely available at the outbreak of the Second World War). Advocating walks along straight lines across the countryside, Graham wrote:

"You should be careful to do as little damage as possible; mend the hedge you have broken, put back the hurdle, avert your face if a lady is swimming in her private pool."<sup>1</sup>

These were the only cautions needed, it would seem, and Graham said he was certain farmers would not object to such use of their land.

The hiking boom, identified by Rickwood as covering the period between 1924 and 1934 (with the "craze years" 1929-32)<sup>2</sup> was generally supported by leaders of the amenity movement, including Lawrence Chubb of the Commons Society and Charles Trevelyan, associated with the preservation movement but also first President of the YHA. The moderate part of the campaign for access to the countryside was seen as being complementary to the campaign for the establishment of national parks.

#### 4. THE CONTINUING CAMPAIGN FOR NATIONAL PARKS

##### (a) The National Parks Committee

The different elements of the amenity movement continued to be closely related up to the Second World War and, as will be seen, many of the developments in the campaign for the establishment of national parks were to have a direct or indirect bearing on the idea of creating formal long-distance paths.

Interest in the preservation of the amenity of the countryside grew considerably after the First World War, and in 1926 the Council

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Graham The Gentle Art of Tramping 1939 edition, Boy Scouts Association, p184.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.Rickwood Public Enjoyment of the Open Countryside in England and Wales 1919-1939 unpublished PhD, University of Leicester, 1973, chapter 7. See overleaf note A.



for Rural Amenities (later the Council for the Preservation of Rural England - CPRE) was established. It too had close ties with the Commons Society and the preservation movement continued to be essentially middle- and upper- class, composed of relatively small numbers of influential people, rather than encouraging mass-support.

Nevertheless, support for preservation to be allied with an opening up of facilities was growing among the rapidly expanding lobby of users of the countryside. In 1928 the Manchester and Sheffield Ramblers' Federations organised the first National Park and Footpath Preservation Conference.<sup>1</sup>

The Conference seems to have provided the catalyst for the campaign. Lord Bledisloe, who owned land in the Forest of Dean and who had experienced the National Parks of North America, followed up the Conference by raising the issue in Parliament and he also instigated a correspondence in the Times. In September 1929, spurred by this and pressure from the CPRE, the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, set up a committee to examine the possibility of creating national parks in Great Britain, under the chairmanship of Dr Christopher Addison, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture.

The eight-man Addison Committee was comprised of members of government departments but it received evidence from a wide range of interested bodies and was clearly sympathetic to the idea of national parks - or national reserves, as it preferred. Evidence of specific relevance to the development of ideas on long-distance footpaths is reviewed in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p16.

Note A - Rickwood's thesis covers the topic from a variety of angles and provides a good background to this part of the present study. However, Rickwood explicitly omits the development of footpaths from his study.

The Addison Committee reported in April 1931<sup>1</sup> recommending the establishment of nature sanctuaries and national reserves, to be coordinated by a National Reserve Authority. The objects of the system it proposed were three-fold: (i) to preserve areas of outstanding natural interest; (ii) nature conservation; and (iii) "to improve the means of access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty."<sup>2</sup>

Of importance from the point of view of this study is the emphasis placed on the last, by which the Committee meant the provision of well-defined tracks with hostels and camping sites to service the walker, rather than the acquisition of areas over which the public would have the right to roam.<sup>3</sup> This was partly in response to the rapid increase in rambling which followed the First World War, but also because cross-country tracks were already being seen as a common desire of the more conservative, preservation-oriented campaigners and the more demanding lobby of the hikers, a point which is explored later in this study.

Most of the Committee's recommendations were within the framework of existing planning laws, requiring only relatively small changes. However, the Committee recognised that action was needed without delay:

"We desire to record our conviction that such measures as we have advocated are necessary if the present generation is to escape the charge that in short sighted pursuit of its immediate ends it has squandered a noble heritage."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the Report failed to stimulate any immediate activity from the government. The apparent failure of the Addison Committee was largely because of the timing of its report, for a few months after it was published a general election replaced the Labour Government which

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the National Parks Committee Cmd 3851, 1931. See also Gordon E. Cherry Peacetime History - Environmental Planning vol II - National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside, 1975, HMSO, chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd 3851 op.cit. para 82.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. para 18.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. para 84.

had sponsored the Report, and the new National Government and, indeed, the whole country were soon preoccupied with the looming economic crisis of the Depression.

(b) Developments through the 1930s

Once circumstances were such that legislation for national parks could once again reasonably be expected, any momentum the Addison Report may have generated was gone. It had also become evident that there was a lack of consensus about what form a national park system should take.<sup>1</sup> Among the preservationists there were those who felt that the National Trust should be boosted into a national parks authority and others who felt that the commons should provide the basis for a system. The extent to which national parks should be public land was disputed. Other people wanted to go ahead and preserve individual areas on an ad.hoc. basis, while, increasingly, the Forestry Commission was seen as being an obvious candidate to preserve the upland areas, especially once it had begun to establish its National Forest Parks.

In addition, the demands of the access campaign and the tactics of its more militant followers had become more extreme in the early 1930s, alienating not only landowners but also many amenity campaigners, with the result that there was little possibility of a common front being exhibited by the amenity movement in general.

Moreover, there was a genuine feeling in the government that existing planning legislation could adequately fulfil many of the ambitions of the amenity movement. The Town Planning Act of 1925 had represented an emboldening of national planning, which was still in its infancy, and the Addison Committee had recognised that it provided a reasonable basis for schemes to preserve the countryside. The 1932

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<sup>1</sup> See Rickwood op.cit. chapter 4.



Town and Country Planning Act further broadened and strengthened the framework and, for example, joint planning schemes were encouraged, with the three counties of the Lake District joining together to create a Joint Advisory Planning Committee in 1934. The Act also provided for compensation to be allowed for schemes creating or enhancing opportunities for the recreational use of the countryside.

The Minister of Health, the responsible Minister, established a Town and Country Planning Advisory Committee and this examined the current situation regarding the planning for the preservation of the countryside. It reported in July 1938<sup>1</sup> concluding that it was "satisfied that a great deal can be done to secure the preservation of the countryside without radical alteration of the existing system"<sup>2</sup> It also illustrated the problem of the relationship between any national park system and the existing national planning framework, a theme which would again be evident following the passage of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. It concluded: "Our bias is also strongly against disturbing the present work of authorities, so soon after the passing of the act of 1932...", which, it considered, provided "unlimited powers".

The Report focussed on the coastline and its problems and opportunities:

"We consider that there is a case for making a part of the cost of preserving holiday areas a charge on national funds, and we recommend that if any Exchequer money is forthcoming it should be expended, first of all, on the preservation of the sea-coast."<sup>3</sup>

This coincided with the publication of the<sup>4</sup> Report of the Coastal Preservation Committee, which reached broadly similar conclusions. The latter stressed the need to provide public access along the coastline and this represented a further important

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health Town and Country Planning Advisory Committee Report on the Preservation of the Countryside 1938.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p2.      <sup>3</sup> ibid. p33.

<sup>4</sup> comprising the Commons Society, CPRE and the National Trust. Report 1938, p8.

element common to those campaigning for preservation and those pressing for freer access. Earlier in the 1930s, Professor C. E. M. Joad, who was associated closely with the campaign for free access, had pressed for a footpath to be established around the whole of the unbuild coastline of Britain, to be protected by zoning, in his <sup>1</sup>  
Charter for Ramblers

There were attempts by the government to make the planning legislation work. For example, in December 1938 the Minister of Health commended the Report of his Advisory Committee to planning <sup>2</sup> authorities, stressing the possibilities for coastal preservation, while the Nineteenth Report of the Ministry of Health (1937-38) also highlighted the opportunities for preservation through zoning, going on to discuss the creation and preservation of footpaths:

"A resolution has been passed by the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, asking the Minister to call the attention of local authorities to the desirability of including in schemes provisions for new cross-country footpaths, especially ridge walks in hill country, and connecting field paths to link with existing pedestrian routes. The value of cross-country footpaths has greatly increased in recent years, as roads with swiftly moving traffic no longer have any attractions for pedestrians... Footways giving access to the countryside or linking up open spaces, are accordingly much to be desired, and the reservation of new paths is a very proper object of planning schemes."<sup>3</sup>

It is unclear whether this urging had any direct effect on local authorities, but, nonetheless, it illustrates the growing importance of the idea of planning for cross-country footpaths as a central part of schemes to preserve and improve the amenity of the countryside.

Inside Parliament there was lobbying for preservation of the <sup>4</sup> countryside, with over twenty questions being asked during the 1930s, and the all-party Amenities Group was reformed in 1933 to lobby ministers. In addition, the National Health and National Fitness

<sup>1</sup> C.E.M.Joad A Charter for Ramblers or The Future of the Countryside 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Circular 1750, see Cherry op.cit. pl2.

<sup>3</sup> Nineteenth Report of the Ministry of Health, 1937-8 Cmd 5801, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> see Rickwood op.cit. chapter 3.



Campaigns through the 1930s were important, stimulating a feeling that open-air recreation was in the interests of the country and should therefore be encouraged by the state. Indeed the CPRE felt that: "There seems to be a general consensus of opinion that the establishment of national parks and national Forest Parks should be a part of the National Fitness campaign"<sup>1</sup>.

Numbers involved in the preservation campaign were never large, but several individuals in the public eye gave important publicity to the cause, notably, G M Trevelyan. As well as contributions to books and pamphlets, Trevelyan gave a number of important lectures, including the Rickman Goldlee Lecture at University College, London, in 1931<sup>2</sup>. The following quotation from this illustrates the common ground between the preservationists and those campaigning for freer access, and it also indicates the direct descent of the amenity movement from the Romantic era:

"But to many of us, city life can only be rendered tolerable on the condition of frequent holidays in the real country, and for that reason, if for no other, the real country must be preserved in sufficient quantity to satisfy the soul thirsts of the town dweller.... Nature, no doubt, acts as a comforter and giver of strength even in southern woodlands and on smooth hillsides. But to many of us the moorland and the mountains seem to have more rugged strength and faithfulness with which in solitude we can converse and draw thence strength and comfort."<sup>3</sup>

Another example from a different sphere was the agriculturalist, Professor R G Stapledon. In The Hill Land of Britain he stressed the idea of the uplands of Britain being the heritage of all the British people. He wanted to see a living countryside, with the range of land-uses being considered together - including public recreation. He called for facilities to enable townspeople to visit the countryside with "a proper network of paths, tracks and rides for hikers, cyclists and riders."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CPRE Monthly Report XL, 1937, pl7.

<sup>2</sup> see Preface to J.P.Rossiter An Analytical Study of the Public Use of Private Land for Recreation in England 1949-1968 unpublished PhD, Cambridge, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> R.G.Stapleton The Hill Lands of Britain 1937, Faber & Faber.



A most important event in the 1930s, from the standpoint of the amenity movement in general, was the establishment in 1936 of the Standing Committee on National Parks, which attempted to bring together all the different threads and present an influential front. The initiative for this came from the Joint Committee of Open-Air Organisations, representing the various user-groups, but it was to be the CPRE which took over the organisation of the Standing Committee. In fact, the Ramblers were soon to feel the group was over-cautious<sup>1</sup> and conservative. Nevertheless, the Standing Committee was extremely influential throughout the latter part of the 1930s and through the 1940s - although its first major action did not meet with much immediate success.

In 1937 it sent a deputation to R.S. Hudson, the Minister of Health, to point out the defects in the existing planning legislation and to press for national parks. Hudson was backed by George Pepler, the Chief Planning Officer at the Ministry, who had been prominent in the early deliberations on the idea of national parks and who did not favour their creation in England and Wales. The Standing Committee did not find much sympathy with their arguments. However, Hudson's advice for the Committee was for it to change public attitudes and to create a large public demand for national parks, and ultimately this was to prove critical.

The Standing Committee, backed by the Carnegie Trust, embarked on a large-scale publicity campaign and in 1938 published its Case for National Parks, which sold 40,000 copies. This set out ideas and objectives more clearly and forcibly than the Addison Committee had done. It argued that the existing planning framework did not work

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<sup>1</sup> Rickwood op.cit. p137.

where it was most needed because it was generally permissive and was ignored by the poorest authorities - which tended to cover the sort of areas which were potential national parks. The booklet pressed strongly for a separate national parks system to be established incorporating its own planning powers. It continued:

"A National Park may be defined in broad terms, as an extensive district of beautiful wilder landscape, strictly preserved in its natural aspect and kept or made widely accessible for public enjoyment and open-air recreation, including particularly cross-country walking, while continuing in its traditional farming use."<sup>1</sup>

In 1939 the Standing Committee published a draft bill for national parks and the campaigners claimed that they had established widespread support for their proposals. Even the right-wing Field magazine said in an editorial on national parks:

"It seems....to be very laudable indeed that young men and women of humble origin and small means should be prepared to trudge the countryside in pursuit of fresh air and sunshine and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>2</sup>

However, once again a national crisis was to remove the possibility of immediate legislation, this time the outbreak of the Second World War.

## 5. THE CONTINUING CAMPAIGN FOR PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

### (a) The Hiking Boom

Developments during the 1920s have already been examined and it has been seen that the hiking boom following the First World War culminated in what Rickwood has called "the craze years" of 1929 to 1932<sup>3</sup>. While, through their histories, the campaigns for the preservation of the countryside and the improvement of public access have been closely linked, ironically, when a considerable momentum had

<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on National Parks The Case for National Parks in Great Britain 1938, p4.

<sup>2</sup> The Field 9th July 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Rickwood op.cit. chapter 5.

been built up, the first half of the 1930s saw the two sides frequently in opposition to each other.

This was because the aggressive political nature of one faction of the hikers' movement was at its most powerful at this time, alienating the relatively conservative conservation movement - and, indeed, alienating many other hikers as well as landowners. The more militant campaign for access to the mountains and moorlands is briefly reviewed in the second part of this section. However, although this campaign often seems to dominate this period, other developments related to public access and the enjoyment of the countryside were to be more important in the long run than the attempts to get unlimited access to the uncultivated uplands.

The increased use of footpaths by ordinary people throughout the countryside led to the preservation of paths which would otherwise have been lost. It also focussed attention on the network of paths that there was in the country, and its potential for recreational use at relatively little cost to local or national authorities.

A further boost came in 1932 with the passing of the Rights of Way Act, simplifying the law on rights of way in England and Wales. The Commons Society, which had been able to use its influence advising local authorities on matters relating to rights of way and had acted as arbitrator in disputes, was able to use its influence in Parliament to secure the Act, as it had done to achieve legislation preserving the commons. In fact, the Rights of Way Act was secured only after 26 years of trying and twelve bills, and the 1932 Act was seen as a major success for the amenity movement. The Society went on to campaign, with mixed success, for local authorities to sign post and record rights of way and, of major significance to this study, it pressed for



the development of cross-country footpaths, which helped to establish the idea in the public sector.

Assisting in the use of the countryside had been various developments such as the provision of hikers' excursions on the railways and the opening of relatively inexpensive accommodation by groups such as the Holiday Fellowship and the CHA. Towards the end of the 1920s local hiking groups had begun to establish hostels and this, and the attention being paid to the rapidly-growing national hostels systems on the Continent, led to a further development of major significance.

This was the establishment of the Youth Hostels Association (YHA) of England and Wales, which was founded in 1930 by members of the National Council of Social Services, primarily on the instigation of the British Youth Council.

The timing and the current hiking boom made the idea certain to succeed, but even so the growth of the movement was remarkable. Membership grew rapidly each year through the 1930s, including through the Depression. From 6,500 members in 1931 the figure grew to 60,000<sup>1</sup> in 1936 and over 80,000 at the end of the decade.

The first President of the YHA was Charles Trevelyan, a prominent leader of the preservation movement in the inter-war period, and he afforded the Association a great deal of publicity. For example, in 1933 he was featured in The Times asserting:

"Though started in the most unpropitious years [the YHA] has already become one of the most important and hopeful phenomena of our time... At a time when the young have little money for recreation and are, in consequence, imprisoned in the cities all year round - a most dreadful tragedy - the YHA offers them a series of hostels within walking distance of one another where a bed can be had for one shilling a night."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1707 FAC 36 (Public Records Office). See also A Short History of the Y.H.A. (n.d., c1966).

<sup>2</sup> The Times 21st January 1933.

He argued that there could only be a partial satisfaction to be gained from the preservation of the countryside if it could not be used, and he concluded:

"There can be no work more nationally important than to provide facilities for the habit of country walking to become common among the youth of our cities....In Germany it operates on a massive scale, for in the Fatherland the folk seem to be as fond of walking as our people are of betting and watching football"<sup>1</sup>

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The YHA indeed had a major impact on the outdoor movement, allowing and encouraging walking for pleasure and establishing chains of hostels which allowed very large numbers all over the country to spend weekends and holidays exploring the countryside. The movement was organised on strictly non-political basis, and its neutral position made it equally acceptable to the establishment and to the hikers alike.

These various developments all attracted publicity, but one newspaper in particular was to have a considerable impact on the outdoor movement in the 1930s. This was the Daily Herald, which boasted the worlds' largest readership of a daily paper at this time. Following the publication of the Addison Report it launched its National Hiking League to encourage "one of the oldest and finest of our national pastimes."<sup>3</sup> It later published a ten-point plan for the League, which included keeping its apolitical nature, the promotion of national health through outdoor exercise, the encouragement of good behaviour, the stimulation of Parliament to look to hikers rights and the dissemination of information to hikers. The newspaper, through 1931, reported endorsements for its League from, among others, Lawrence Chubb of the Commons Society and the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> This is a topic worthy of study.

<sup>3</sup> The Daily Herald 4th May 1931, p8b.

(b) The Campaign for Free Access

There was thus a considerable momentum for the open-air movement in the early 1930s, with the publicity and the widespread and varied support. However, it also became increasingly obvious that there were problems. Landowners in popular areas found themselves inundated by large groups of hikers, most of whom were townsfolk ignorant of the ways of the countryside. Valiant attempts were made to control behaviour by the leaders of the various rambling groups, but books like Graham's The Gentle Art of Tramping continued to be published through the 1930s, advocating 'trespass walks'. In some more sensitive areas restrictions and confrontations were inevitable and, indeed, it seems clear that the more extreme members of the access campaign actively sought confrontation for political gain.

It was in the Peak District of Derbyshire where the worst problems arose, with clashes between gamekeepers and hikers even in the 1920s. Railway centres like Edale attracted very large numbers of hikers at weekends, from both the Manchester and the Sheffield areas. The Depression exacerbated the situation because the unemployed often spent their time in this area, and there was a camp for the unemployed near Edale. Moreover, grouse-shooting had become a particularly important economic use of land in the Pennines and the Peak District, and this had resulted in restrictions to public access, which were tightly enforced in many parts of these uplands. The increasing use of these areas for water catchment compounded the problem. The situation was particularly bad in the moorlands close to Edale.

The Winnats Rallies, referred to previously, gave expression to the frustrations felt by hikers. These rallies were organised in the



early 1930s by the militant Sheffield Federation of Ramblers, and trespass was encouraged. However, there were other groups advocating stronger action, including physical confrontations. Two of these, the British Workers' Sports Federation and the Ramblers' Rights Movement, satellites of the Communist Party, were behind the event which proved to be the climax of these struggles in the Peak District.

This was the Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout of 1932. Some 500 men were involved in this, but it was an event disowned in advance by the Ramblers' Federations, which saw it as a deliberate confrontation with the gamekeepers and the police. In fact, the severity of treatment of six persons who were arrested during the Trespass - five were given gaol sentences - made them martyrs of the access movement and focussed public attention on the situation in the Peak District.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the struggles in the Peak District is usually exaggerated, for it was not typical of the situation over most of the country, where the vast majority of walkers continued to be uninvolved in the politics of access and where there were still relatively few restrictions to access. Nevertheless, the Peak District did attract considerable attention. As early as 1925 the Manchester Guardian had commented:

"There is something wantonly perverse in a society in which the rights of property can be used to defeat the emotions in which mankind has found its chief inspiration and comfort. If ever any truth lurked in the phrase 'the rights of man', those rights should surely include the right to climb the mountains and the rights to dream beside the sea."<sup>2</sup>

This sentiment was forcibly echoed in the words of a song, written shortly after the Mass Trespass by Ewan McColl, the Press Officer of the Ramblers' Rights Movement. This song is important because it became for a time the 'anthem' of hikers throughout the country and

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the Mass Trespass see Rickwood op.cit. p227.

<sup>2</sup> The Manchester Guardian 21st April 1925.

therefore would have as great an impact in shaping attitudes as would the books, articles and submissions being written about the problem at this time. This was the Manchester Rambler:

(chorus) "I'm a Rambler, I'm a Rambler from Manchester way,  
I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way;  
I may be a wage-slave on Monday  
But I am a free man on Sunday.

The day was just ending as I was descending by Grindsbrook  
just by Upper Tor  
When a voice cried 'Hey you' in the way 'keepers do, he'd  
the worst face that ever I saw.  
The things that he said were unpleasant, in the teeth of his  
fury I said  
That sooner than part from the mountains I love  
I think I would rather be dead.

He called me a louse and said 'think of the grouse' and I  
thought but I just couldn't see  
Why that old Kinder Scout and the moors round about should  
not hold both poor grouse and me.  
He said 'All this land is my master's!' at this I stood  
shaking my head  
No man has the right to the mountains, no more than the  
deep ocean bed."<sup>1</sup>

Following the Mass Trespass, two important books did appear, supporting access. One was a book of photographs of the Peak District by Phil Barnes, one of the leaders of the Ramblers Federations. It was entitled Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted and it pointed to 215 square miles around Kinder Scout which were "completely natural" but which were effectively barred to ordinary people. He made a plea for the removal of restrictions to access:

"Then thousands of young people from busy factories and offices, mean streets and dreary suburbs could enjoy here the healthiest recreation and exercise. In wild, unspoilt surroundings they could find in some degree that sense of adventurous freedom which others, more fortunately placed, seek in the Alps and elsewhere on the Continent. At present, because a few score 'sportsmen' spend the lovely autumn days in slaughtering as many grouse as possible, people are excluded from the moors not only during the nesting and shooting seasons, but throughout the year."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ewan McColl Manchester Rambler Harmony Music.

<sup>2</sup> Phil Barnes Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted - Views of the Forbidden Moors of the Peak District 1934, Barnes, Sheffield.

Barnes quoted Edwin Royce, President of the Manchester and District Ramblers Federation, and one of the most important of the leaders of the Ramblers through the 1930s and 1940s: "The prohibition of access to thousands of acres of hills and moorlands on the threshold of large industrial populations - as in the Peak District - is wasteful, unsocial and wickedly provocative."<sup>1</sup>

The other important book was A Charter for Ramblers by Professor C. E. M. Joad, published in 1934. The oft-quoted phrase "And it is, indeed, here that this generation has replaced beer by 'hiking' as the shortest cut out of Manchester"<sup>2</sup> came from this.

The subtitle of his book, 'The future of the countryside', indicated that its concern was wider than just the access problems in the Peak District, and it was indeed widely read. Joad was full of praise for the opportunities provided by the YHA, pointing out that bednights had risen from 20,000 in 1931 to 150,000 in 1933. He also noted a similar increase in interest in the Camping Club, with membership doubling between 1931 and 1933 to 6,000. In fact in his proposed Charter he did put first an Access to Mountains bill - he felt that this was essential because of this vast increase in interest in the countryside. The other three points in the Charter were a new Town and Country Planning Act to provide more positive duties for local authorities, the establishment of national parks and the development of footpaths.

Joad was adamant that the walker was more important than the landowner, sportsman or even farmer, and he was concerned that, because of the increase in car traffic, the tradition of walking tours was dying. He quoted Professor Trevelyan's comment on the perfection

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Joad op.cit.



of cross-country walking: "The secret beauties of Nature are revealed only to the cross-country walker. Pan would not have appeared to Pheidippes on the road."<sup>1</sup> and Joad pressed for a new system of<sup>2</sup> footpaths to be created.

The rift between the leaders of the access movement and the preservation lobby had grown fast in the period of militancy, and a review of Joad's Charter for Ramblers in the Journal of the Commons Society illustrates the impatience of the more conservative campaigners with the situation: "Mr Joad in this book is like a man run amok - you never know whom he will hit next," continuing that, if he were fairer, he could be a good ally.

The Commons Society, the National Trust and the CPRE had no time for the militant Ramblers and even the Manchester Guardian condemned the extremists. It was increasingly recognised that their attention-seeking exploits had been counter-productive, alienating potential allies and giving the whole movement an irresponsible image. It had hardened attitudes - restrictions were now greater than ever and no progress could be recorded at a time when the amenity movement had built up a considerable momentum in the struggle to increase public access to the mountains and moorlands.

#### (c) The End of the Hiking Boom

Inevitably, the hiking craze began to tail off, in part because of the stigma being attached to the term 'hiker'. As early as 1933

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1 ibid. p31.

2 ibid. pp55-57.

membership of hiking clubs began to decline, although use of youth hostels and Holiday Fellowship and CHA guest houses continued to increase. This gives further support for the view that it was the political nature of the hiking groups which was losing its appeal, rather than walking for pleasure in the countryside. In addition, part of the craze had been the result of the campaign in the Daily Herald, and this had lost momentum. By the middle of the decade. This left a large population of walkers, largely uninterested in the politics of access, plus a small declining core of more militant campaigners, supported by dwindling groups of supporters. This is not to say that the large number of walkers did not wish to see facilities and opportunities improved - there was continuing pressure for this, but the desire was to go about achieving this in a far less militant way.

The Ramblers Federations recognised that fragmentation of leadership within the access movement and the amenity movement in general had led to a situation where mass support for rambling in the late 1920s and early 1930s could not be used to fulfil any goals. In the middle of the 1930s, the various Federations began to ally more closely and the Ramblers Association was created in September, 1935. This tied together most of the Federations, although the important Manchester and District Federation, wary of possible southern bias and concerned that the Association would lack resolve, did not join until 1939.

In fact, access and the problems in the Kinder Scout area did continue to dominate the concerns of the Manchester and Sheffield Ramblers and a continuing gulf between the north and the south is evident as late as 1939, when the Handbook of the Southern Federation resented the emphasis on the Peak District, suggesting that the main

attraction of Kinder Scout ("something of an ugly mountain") as a weekend mecca of town walkers was purely because trampers were forbidden to go there.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, there are clear signs that the gulf between the Ramblers' movement and between the Ramblers and other groups such as the Commons Society were beginning to narrow again in the second half of the 1930s, as the militancy declined. There was more cooperation in campaigns such as that staged by the Standing Committee on National Parks, to which all the organisations belonged. Indeed, in 1937 Sir Felix Brunner of the Commons Society was reported in The Times as saying "Ramblers in the main set a high standard in the understanding of the code of behaviour in the country"<sup>2</sup> and the Commons Society and the CPRE seem to have made efforts to work closely with the Ramblers Association at a number of meetings, including meetings with the representatives of landowners. They also cooperated in projects such as the very successful and well-publicised warden schemes.

In fact, at the end of the decade the whole of the amenity movement was to cooperate in an attempt to secure access to the uplands, although this did not work out as satisfactorily as was hoped.

#### (d) The Access to Mountains Bill

As has been seen, one of the goals common to most of the amenity movement, including the militant access campaign, had been the securing of an Access to Mountains Act. The first Access to Mountains Bill had been in 1884, and, although that was to apply only to Scotland, it was followed at close intervals over the next fifty years by Bills which would apply to the whole of Great Britain. In 1908, Charles Trevelyan had achieved a Second Reading for his Bill and one had got as far as a Standing Committee in 1924.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ramblers Handbook - Southern Federation 1939, p21.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 1st March 1937, p10f.



However, despite the fact that most of these early bills were promoted by leaders of the preservation movement, the developments within the access campaign in the middle of the inter-war period led to many within the more conservative part of the amenity movement directly opposing such a measure. These included Lawrence Chubb of the Commons Society. Moreover, by the latter part of the 1930s the access campaign had clearly lost some of its momentum and it seemed very unlikely that there would be another such Bill presented for some time, and even more unlikely that one would reach the statute books in the foreseeable future.

However, in 1938 Arthur Creech-Jones, the Labour Member of Parliament for Shipley, won a strong position in the private members' ballot and introduced the eighteenth Access to Mountains Bill. The Ramblers Association rallied support for the measure, writing to all Members of Parliament, and even the YHA, which generally kept out of any situation with political involvement, passed a resolution supporting the Bill.

In fact, the Bill must be seen in the context of the National Fitness Campaign which had grown through the 1930s and had been given legislative support through the Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Creech-Jones stressed that he was amenable to amendments being made to his Bill. Finally, as has been suggested, relationships between ramblers and landowners, which had remained good throughout most of the country, had improved in some of the problem areas with the introduction of wardening schemes, operated with cooperation between the landowners, the preservation groups and the Ramblers groups.

Despite his previous opposition to the idea, it was Lawrence Chubb himself who coordinated discussions between the various interested

<sup>1</sup> see Physical Training and Recreation Cmd 5364, 1937.

parties to draft acceptable amendments to the bill, and it was changes suggested by Chubb which became the basis for what was in effect a new bill substituted at Committee stage. However, to the horror of the Ramblers, the changes had the effect of completely altering the tenor of the Bill. The onus was put on the Ramblers to show that there was a need for access to be approved over a specific area where previously the Bill would have had the effect of declaring access to uncultivated uplands a right. Moreover, a clause was introduced making trespass in some circumstances a criminal offence, and the user groups, including the Ramblers Association, bitterly resented this. They therefore withdrew their support and, in fact, began to campaign against the Bill, which Tom Stephenson called "the Great Betrayal".<sup>1</sup>

Despite this opposition the Bill was passed, although it was never implemented because of the outbreak of war. The Access to Mountains Act brought a great deal of publicity to the campaign for access and was, in fact, the most that the Ramblers could have realistically hoped for in the circumstances, with landowners still retaining a tight grip in Parliament. The acceptance of the principle of public access to uncultivated uplands was a major step.

The campaigners for access and the Ramblers lobby did nonetheless feel that they had been let down and there was considerable animosity between the leaders of the Ramblers Association and Lawrence Chubb in particular. This experience for the leaders of the Ramblers proved to be extremely important in the long run, for it had the effect of stirring them on to take a more prominent place at the head of the amenity movement.

This theme is continued in Chapter Four, which traces the developments leading up to the formalisation of legislation for countryside matters.

<sup>1</sup> Rucksack vol 10,3, Autumn 1980, pp12/3.

## 6. CONCLUSION

By the 1930s, the movement which can be traced back to the eighteenth century, came to a head, with walking for pleasure and appreciation of nature becoming popular pastimes. A distinction can be seen between the two elements of this, the former, the open air movement, epitomised by the campaign for access, and the latter, a more select movement, which developed earlier, represented by the campaign for national parks. Both struggled for recognition and a strengthening of their positions through the inter-war period, and both had only limited success.

The conservation movement lost its main opportunity because of the timing of the Addison Report, which was completely overshadowed by the economic situation developing in the early 1930s. In fact, although the main objective of the campaigners, the establishment of national parks, was not achieved, planning laws did become stronger through the period, meeting some of the objectives of the movement.

On the other hand, the Ramblers lobby, the main part of the open-air movement, lost its main opportunity because it was unable to organise the massive numbers of hikers in the boom period in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Pressures on certain parts of the British countryside led to an alienation of some landowners, and the extreme political nature of some of the campaign did nothing to strengthen its position, attracting much adverse press publicity. In fact, even with the large 'grass roots' support for the ramblers' cause, something which the conservation movement never had, the inter-war period saw the imposition of further restrictions on walkers, although restrictions tended to be localised and to be exaggerated by the campaigners, with the Kinder Scout area of the Peak District becoming



a focus of attention.

Rickwood recorded the distinction between the two elements of the amenity campaign in his summary:

"The first and most obvious point to recall the almost total separation which lay between them for many of their problems can ultimately be traced back to this overriding fact. Indeed, it is impossible to see their respective histories, their support and opposition their objectives, and even to some extent the political influence they command mainly in terms of contrast rather than concurrence."<sup>1</sup>

This rather overstated the situation, because many of the campaigners in each faction wished to see the aims of the other fulfilled, and some personalities, such as T A Leonard, are closely associated with both groups. Too much emphasis tends to be put on the extreme but localised events and problems of the Peak District. Nonetheless, there were clear contrasts in the positions of both movements, and so those parts of the campaigns which were common to both and which were generally supported and stressed took on a very important role.

One of these was the growing demand for cross-country footpaths, and the development through the 1930s of the idea of these, and of one in particular, the Pennine Way, is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Rickwood op.cit. p346.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE IDEA OF THE PENNINE WAY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The support given by the Addison Report for cross-country paths as a major part of a national parks system has already been noted and support came for the development of trails from a range of bodies giving evidence to the Committee. For example, the Ramblers Federations of Great Britain (comprising Glasgow, Huddersfield, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Sheffield), giving evidence in March 1930, stressed that :<sup>1</sup>"Wherever possible, new footways should be opened up, especially as connecting links and to avoid roads. Such footways are in no way inconsistent with allowing land to remain in agricultural occupation." In upland areas, the Federation proposed that national parks be created to furnish "at least the greater part of a day's walking - say 20 miles (32 km)", but it was in the lowland south of England where the proposals were of most significance:

"What is wanted here is to link up existing open spaces by judicious purchase of other land - in many places comparatively narrow strips would suffice, or even a right of way across woods or pastures, so that the rambler could take the train or bus to a point fifteen or twenty miles out and walk as far as he wished on national property, returning by one of the intersecting roads or railways at the end of the day."<sup>2</sup>

The Federation was proposing that cross-country footpaths - at this stage of limited length to allow day walks - become the backbone of a national parks system.

Similarly, a group of individuals submitted evidence to Committee to make the South Downs a national park. They proposed that it be based on a right of way along the unenclosed ridge.<sup>3</sup>

Among others, both Professor Joad and the Standing Committee on

<sup>1</sup> Cmd 3851 op.cit. pp72/3.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. <sup>3</sup> ibid. p78.

National Parks called for the development of cross-country paths, in the early 1930s, while the Commons Society began to lay considerable stress on such a provision. For example, the Society's Journal in 1933 discussed the problem of access to uncultivated land. It was recognised that three approaches were being put forward to secure this: the first through the acquisition of land in national parks which would be designated; the second through an Access to Mountains Act; and the third through schemes for developing new footpaths. The Society did not favour the compulsory acquisition of land nor the idea of legislation. However, it did support:

"the plea for the creation of new cross-country footpath routes to enable the walker to make his way from point to point through natural scenery and without being driven onto the roads for lack of any alternative."<sup>1</sup>

The Society's resolution on the desirability of cross-country paths being incorporated into planning schemes, which was noted in the 19th Annual report of the Ministry of Health, has already been quoted and was a significant development.

Few specific cross-country paths were mentioned and probably only a supplementing of the existing network of footpaths was envisaged by most of the proponents of the idea, rather than grand schemes for named routes. The idea of these was to develop later. However, the submission to the Addison Committee concerning the South Downs was an exception for it suggested a facility which would allow several days' walking between Beachy Head and Winchester:

"There would be provided a 70 mile (112 km) walk along a green 'ridgeway, through typical English countryside, with convenient halts and camp-sites at regular intervals."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time the youth hostelling movement was growing fast in England and Wales and one of its early schemes was to provide a chain of hostels along the Pilgrims Way - "to open up the road to scholars

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol 2, 1933, p57.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd 3581 op.cit. p78.



and young folk". Indeed, the early development of the YHA was based on chains of hostels throughout the country.

In addition there were occasionally reports publicising footpath systems overseas. The facilities for the hiker in Germany were frequently cited, while the Manchester Ramblers' Handbook for 1937 featured an article on the 2050 mile (3280 km) Appalachian Trail<sup>2</sup>, and two years later the Handbook referred to a Canadian system of trails and an 'Order of Skyline Trail Hikers'. In 1937 the Commons Society in its Journal reviewed a network of waymarked tourist trails being developed by the Touring Club of Belgium, and noted a 621 mile (994 km) international path from Bois-le-Duc in Holland to Mulhouse in France<sup>3</sup>.

The concept of cross-country paths received general support for a number of reasons, the majority of which are still valid today. Firstly, unlike free access to the upland areas, it represented a controlled facility on which hikers could be channelled and disruption kept to a minimum. This appealed to landowners and the more conservative of the amenity campaigners, whereas to the hikers who demanded free access, cross-country paths represented a complementary facility. Secondly, walking for pleasure was seen as a tradition by many Englishmen, by the growing numbers of workers who spent their holidays and free time in the countryside and also by many of the landed interests who appreciated the tradition. To illustrate this, an article appeared in the Times in 1936, describing a three and a half day walk undertaken by a barrister from Temple Bar in London to the coast. The correspondent claimed that he had had difficulty in finding paths, and that he kept getting lost.

"It is surely worth reviving footpaths and bridle roads of Southern England and even setting up a guide post or two... If we could only revive the habit of walking as our father walked, for

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol 2, 1933, p57.

<sup>2</sup> Ramblers Federation Handbook Manchester & District Federation, vol IV 1937, pp201-8.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, 1937.

pleasure as opposed to hiking in gangs for exercise, we might breed a generation as healthy and far more enterprising than any that is driven into the open air by the forced discipline of a totalitarian dictatorship."<sup>1</sup>

L. Morris, of the Southern Federation of the Ramblers Association subsequently wrote to the Times referring the correspondent to the One Inch Ordnance Survey maps and to the "numerous" books on country walks, and this led to Morris receiving some 100 inquiries from<sup>2</sup> readers of the Times.

Thirdly, the strength of the Health Campaign in the 1930s made it difficult not to support a demand that more facilities should be provided to enable people to walk in the countryside. Fourthly, the advent of the Youth Hostels movement focussed attention on walking tours. Increasing pressure from traffic on the roads led to a demand for alternative ways to the by-roads which had traditionally been used for such walking tours, and this added to the growing pressure for traffic-free cross-country routes.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, cross-country footpaths were a demand of the amenity campaign which fitted into the existing planning and legal frameworks, unlike national parks or access areas. Indeed, most attention in the second half of the 1930s was for the incorporation of cross-country paths into local planning schemes, a policy endorsed by the Ministry of Health, the planning ministry, in<sup>3</sup> its Report for 1937/8

These factors led to the mid-1930s being the ideal time for the inception of ideas for specific facilities for cross-country walkers and, although other ideas were put forward, it was to be one particular route which was to dominate the subject: the Pennine Way.

<sup>1</sup> The Times 23rd October 1936, pl7f.

<sup>2</sup> Ramblers Handbook Southern Federation, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd 5801 op.cit.

## 2. A PENNINE WAY

### (a) Tom Stephenson<sup>1</sup>

The Pennine Way was a new idea raised in the mid-1930s by a person who was at that time in a very strong position to make and publicise proposals. This was Tom Stephenson, in the 1930s the Rambling Correspondent of the Daily Herald which, with a circulation of over two million copies a day, claimed to be the world's largest-selling newspaper.

Stephenson was born in 1893, and was brought up in a working-class family in North-East Lancashire. As has been noted, it was in this areas that T.A. Leonard encouraged a tradition of walking in the countryside, and Stephenson at an early age found enjoyment in rambling over Pendle Hill and the moors of the Central Pennines. A second characteristic of this area was a tradition of self-improvement, and from leaving school at thirteen to work in a textile factory, Stephenson attended night school, winning a scholarship to the Royal College of Science in London. He had also become active in the Labour movement, and a belief in pacifism led to his spending the Great War in prison as a conscientious objector. This resulted in his losing his college place. He moved south after the war, becoming active in the Independent Labour Party and in 1922 took up a post at the Labour Party's National Office.

Through his political involvement, Stephenson met a large number of influential figures from T.A. Leonard to politicians such as Philip Snowden, Ramsay MacDonald and Lewis Silkin, all of them members of the Independent Labour Party at that time. Stephenson had begun writing articles for the Hiker and Camper, and two years later Ernest Bevin offered him the position of editor of that journal. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> see Ramblers Association Tom Stephenson (booklet) 1976. Other information from Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.



Bevin used the considerable influence of the Trades Union Congress to get the Daily Herald to take Stephenson on as the Rambling and Open Air Correspondent of that newspaper.

(b) The Article in the Daily Herald

Stephenson's articles in the Herald covered a wide range of topics related to the countryside. They were often political in nature, and had frequent references to "the right to roam" and the need to preserve footpaths. Other articles were descriptive. In mid-1935, for example, the Saturday articles described walks and the scenery around Stonehenge, in the Black Mountains and in the Cairngorms. However, one article was to combine a strong argument for more freedom for ramblers with a description of an area and was to have lasting significance, although this article came about quite by chance.

Stephenson was telephoned by the features editor of the Daily Herald and asked for a 'middle' for that afternoon. As Rambling Correspondent of the Herald Free Advice Bureau, Stephenson had the same morning been forwarded a letter from two American girls, asking if Great Britain had an equivalent to the Appalachian Trail, and this coincidence prompted Stephenson to write his now famous article<sup>1</sup> 'Wanted - A Long Green Trail'

In fact, less than half the article was about the proposed trail - the first 60% of the feature reiterated concerns and demands of hikers, which were frequently the subject of Stephenson's articles, this time contrasting the restrictions to be found in Great Britain with the Appalachian Trail. He pointed to the government aid which was given to the Trail, and noted that it had in fact already been eclipsed by the 2500 mile (4000 km) John Muir Trail (actually the

<sup>1</sup> The Daily Herald 22nd June 1935, p10 - half page article with photograph.



Pacific Crest Trail). Instead of finding such trails in Great Britain, Stephenson asserted, the girls who requested information on walking in this country:

"will discover that though walking is a most popular pastime with thousands of devotees, yet nationally nor locally has there been any serious effort to meet the needs of the growing army of young folk attracted to the healthiest form of recreation." <sup>1</sup>

Restrictions abounded, he maintained, and although paths remained: "these form but a small fraction of our original heritage." He then moved his argument to the Peak District - "Nowhere in Britain are the restrictions so rigid and the paths so few..." despite the popularity of the area, which he illustrated by referring to the strength of the Winnats Rallies.

The article went on to press for an Access to Mountains Bill, but then came the now-famous idea:

"Without sacrificing the ideal [for free access] why should we not press for something akin to the Appalachian Trail - a Pennine Way from the Peak to the Cheviot. This need be no Euclidean line but a meandering way deviating as needs be to include the best of that long range of moor and fell; no concrete or asphalt track, but just a faint line on the Ordnance maps which the feet of grateful pilgrims would, with the passing years, engrave on the face of the land." <sup>2</sup>

Stephenson proceeded to outline a possible route, to bring out the scenic, historical and cultural significance such a journey could have (crossing Roman roads and experiencing the Bronte Country, for instance), and he stressed the health aspect: "Picture carefree youngsters setting out on such a trail of health and beauty."

Finally, Stephenson suggested the idea be used to commemorate the Jubilee Year:

"Call it the Jubilee Way or the Georgian Path if you will, but let us have this through route to health and happiness for this and succeeding generations who may thus make acquaintance with some of the finest scenery in the land... Whatever the cost, it would be a worthy and enduring testimony, bringing health and pleasure beyond computation, for none could walk that pathway without being inspired in mind and body, inspired and invigorated and filled with the desire to explore every corner of this lovely land." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.



(d) Reaction to the Idea

Stephenson did not immediately follow up on the idea and, indeed, he did not expect it to go any further than previous articles in a similar vein which had been forgotten.<sup>1</sup> However, Stephenson was an occasional contributor to Labour magazine (responsible for an article entitled 'We Want National Parks' early in 1936, for example), and in April 1936 he repeated his idea of a Pennine Way in an article<sup>2</sup> entitled: 'Open Up the Health Trail'.

His main thrust in this was the possibility of the King George Jubilee Trust developing the route, purchasing land along its line. He pointed out that such a facility would make a more permanent contribution than would the grants being given to youth organisations, and he stressed that youth wanted freedom to escape from organised recreation:

"One of the most desirable ways of achieving this would be to establish a continuous footpath of some two hundred miles where young folk could spend their holidays in the open, unimpeded by gamekeepers and unintimidated by those all too prevalent wooden liars 'Trespassers Will be Prosecuted'. Probably the only place in England where a trail of sufficient length could be made is along the Pennines from the Peak to the Cheviot."<sup>3</sup>

However, there is no indication that the idea had much of an impact, and Stephenson later noted in an article on the Pennine Way in the Handbook of the Manchester Ramblers Federation that "when the idea was first mooted it seemed as if the seed had fallen on stony ground. A few favourable comments were made, then silence and no apparent prospects of germination."<sup>4</sup>

The Pennine Way might indeed have been forgotten had not another individual recognised the value of the idea, and "insisted that something be done"<sup>5</sup>. That was T.A. Leonard, then in his seventies, and in 1935 the first Chairman of the Ramblers Association and Vice-

<sup>1</sup> Interview op.cit.

<sup>2</sup> Labour - A Magazine for all Workers vol III, April 1936, p199.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Manchester & District Ramblers Federation Handbook vol IV, 1939, p259.

<sup>5</sup> ibid.



President of the Youth Hostels Association. Leonard featured the idea in the Holiday Fellowship's journal Over The Hills in 1935 and in the same year raised it at an Executive Meeting of the Ramblers Association. He suggested that Edwin Royce, Vice-Chairman of the Association, should work with Stephenson to develop the idea.

The concept of the Pennine Way was thus not lost and was slowly developed behind the scenes with cooperation between Stephenson and the Ramblers Association, although it was the end of 1937 before the idea was again publicised.

### 3. THE PENNINE WAY ASSOCIATION

#### (a) 1937 : Revival of Publicity

At the end of 1937 Stephenson featured the Pennine Way in no fewer than six articles in the Daily Herald between mid-November and mid-<sup>1</sup> December. The first article: 'Open Up the Great North Trail' reiterated the idea, this time in the context of the value of the Pennines as a recreational resource. Stephenson asserted that other countries would have made the Pennines a national park a long time ago and that the area could provide healthy public recreation without interfering with agriculture. He stressed the value of the area as "an escape" to provide the thrill of exploration and to create a new life and philosophy for young people, producing better physique and opening minds to "the beauty and peace and the soul-satisfying gifts of high and lonely places."

"The Pennine may not possess the splendour of Lakeland or the height and magnificence of the Highlands. But they have a sustained appeal. They have a character and diversity, and, above all, a capacity for inspiring a man, and banishing the lethargy of town life."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daily Herald 10th November 1937, p10c-f.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

Stephenson pressed for general access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands - "that must be the ultimate and only solution." However, "while we continue to demand that ideal, I suggest the possibility of effecting something immediately" - the Pennine Way. He claimed that the idea had been well-received and given considerable attention, and he noted the interest of the Ramblers Association, suggesting that "If we can create sufficient demand, possibly some of the difficulties will vanish." Where paths did not exist, land-owners would be persuaded to dedicate them, and compensation would be payable. Failing the successful negotiation of stretches of the proposed route, alternative paths could be found. Stephenson maintained that there was a demand which must be harnessed, and he proposed the creation of a national committee of outdoor organisations to co-ordinate the creation of the Pennine Way:

"It would create a noteworthy precedent, a footpath way to health and happiness, something never attempted in Britain, and a boon to ours and succeeding generations."

Three days later, Stephenson's Saturday column 'Weekend Out of Doors' was 'On the Forbidden Mountains' about Kinder Scout:

"Still the agitation continues, and ultimately we shall create a public opinion which will no longer tolerate an arrangement allowing a few people, for the sake of a week or two's grouse shooting, to bar the rest of the populace from the lovely mountains and wild moorlands...Some day we will have that Pennine Way and be able to sit by Kinder Downfall and chat in friendship with the gamekeeper, if grouse-shooting is not by then a thing forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

Stephenson gave further publicity to the idea at the end of the month with a descriptive article on the central section of the Pennine Way and then at the beginning of December he reviewed Avery's article on the 'Sky-Line Trail' which appeared in the Handbook of the Manchester Ramblers. He conceded that the Pennine Way was in comparison a "modest proposal" but felt that it should therefore be

<sup>1</sup> Daily Herald 13th November 1937, p6d.



easier to implement. He stressed the support for the idea of a Pennine Way, although, significantly, he reiterated the point that complete freedom of access was the ultimate goal. Later in December, Stephenson wrote in the Daily Herald an article about the Ramblers Association, and this set the Pennine Way for the first time as a major goal of the outdoor movement.

"We want to save existing footpaths, to obtain new ones. We want to preserve the beauty of rural Britain and to put an end to ugly and unplanned development. We want National Parks, the Pennine Way and access to mountains."<sup>1</sup>

In addition Stephenson reported on the support for the idea from a number of leaders of the outdoors and amenity groups, in a special article on 19th November 1937.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the development of the Pennine Way was seen as being the precursor of greater things by these individuals - national parks in the case of the Rev. H.H.Symonds (the Secretary of the Friends of the Lake District and an instigator of the YHA) and general access to the uplands in the case of Edwin Royce. George Mitchell, the Secretary of the Ramblers Association, was quoted, suggesting that hostels, camp-sites and other inexpensive accommodation should be a part of the scheme. Stephenson also recorded support from, among others, Lawrence Chubb and G. M. and Charles Trevelyan and that T. A. Leonard, "one of the keenest supporters", had urged that:

"All who know and love these northern fells should take a hand in this venture, either by planning, or in raising the small funds that might be required, or in securing the good will of those who can help the most."<sup>3</sup>

Leonard suggested that the preliminary work be done on 20 mile (32 km) sections by different groups, with the hope that in 1938 the proponents would be in a position to finish way-marking and securing wayleaves. As a next step, Leonard supported Stephenson's proposal that a meeting of interested parties should take place.

<sup>1</sup> Daily Herald 11th December 1937, p15e-f.

<sup>2</sup> Daily Herald 19th November 1937.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.



(b) The Pennine Way Association

That meeting took place on the weekend of 26th - 27th February 1938 at the Workers' Travel Association guest house at Hope in Derbyshire and a well-publicised resolution was passed:

"That this conference having considered the desirability of establishing a continuous footway along the Pennines from the Peak to the Cheviot is convinced that it is in the national interest, on the grounds of the physical and spiritual well-being of the youth of Britain, that immediate steps towards the creation of such a way now be taken. That the wide, health-giving moorlands and high places of solitude, the features of natural beauty and the places of historical interest along the Pennine Way give this route a special character and attractiveness which should be available for all time as a national heritage of the youth of this country and of all who feel the call of the hills and lonely places."<sup>1</sup>

T.A. Leonard became Chairman, and Stephenson and Royce Joint-Secretaries, of a newly founded committee established at the meeting to promote the idea and this became the Pennine Way Association. Much of the route was confirmed or decided at the meeting and it was estimated that about 60 miles (96 km) of the route were without rights of way, although on sixteen miles (26 km) of this there were no restrictions. Sub-committees were established to carry out detailed fieldwork, which would involve recording existing accommodation near the line of the route, existing facilities, common land, the nature of the ground and the attitudes of the land-owners.<sup>2</sup>

The Daily Herald, which had provided 'hospitality' for the meeting, gave the new Committee good publicity with an article '250 mile Way to Health Demanded', once more stressing the benefits of such a proposal<sup>3</sup> to the health and enjoyment of the youth of the country.

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1 Journal of the Commons Society vol X 1951-52, pp236-241.

2 Handbook of the Manchester & District Ramblers Federation, vol IV 1939, pp295-298.

3 Daily Herald 28th February 1938, p7.

The following weekend, Stephenson reported on 'The First Steps' in his weekend column, concluding that:

"Unobtrusive work and persistent advocacy for two and a half years of the Pennine Way were well-rewarded by the reception given to the project at the conference held last week. Those of us who have been concerned with launching the scheme felt it had passed the stage of visionary idealism and had become a practical possibility."<sup>1</sup>

(c) Further Publicity

Hitherto, most of the publicity for the Pennine Way had come directly from Tom Stephenson in the Daily Herald. It seems likely that doubts had been expressed about the idea from some of those ramblers most concerned with access to the moorlands, who may have felt that creation of footpaths could have been used to 'fob off' the campaigners. Stephenson had countered this by continually stressing the importance of the ultimate goal of full access. However, following the conference, the idea of the Pennine Way began to get widespread coverage, which included some criticism.

The Manchester Guardian reported the conference and, although generally sympathetic, it picked up one discordant note in the discussions, concerning the possible dangers of parts of the route in bad weather.<sup>2</sup> This had, in fact, been resolved at the conference by agreement that the route be waymarked in these sections.

Useful publicity from the Manchester Guardian continued, with a map<sup>3</sup> of the proposed route being published early in March 1938 and a feature on the route appeared in April.<sup>4</sup> This was an article 'The Pennines Unchained' by Ivor Brown, and it echoed many of Stephenson's arguments:

<sup>1</sup> Daily Herald 5th March 1938, p8.

<sup>2</sup> Manchester Guardian 28th February 1938, p14.

<sup>3</sup> Manchester Guardian 7th March 1938,

<sup>4</sup> Manchester Guardian 9th April 1938, p8a-b.



"Not all our mountains are accessible, and the liberty which is common in the Lake District is by no means so public in the Pennines. What a plague to man are the unwitting grouse whose innocent presence is the cause of so much greed, builds the unsocial fence and makes the moorland a battleground instead of a source of healing for nerves and tempers and a fountain of much-needed peace!1"

Brown reviewed the "imaginative plan" (which at this stage had its northern terminus at Wooler in Northumberland), and he praised its potential contribution to the fitness campaign and to help bring social justice. However, he noted the problems to be faced, primarily in the south, and he added: "Unless Parliament intervenes it may, I suppose, be necessary to give up the Edale terminus for one further north." A lack of variety of parts of the route was Brown's only criticism.

One person who gave considerable support to the outdoor movement from the 1920s onwards was Patrick Monkhouse. He was with the Manchester Guardian from 1926 and was its Assistant Editor from 1946, although in the second half of the 1930s he was, in fact, with the Evening Standard. In March 1938 he wrote an article on the Pennine<sup>2</sup> Way for the Spectator. This is of considerable interest as the first piece not wholly in support of the idea. Following a summary of the development of the idea of the Pennine Way, Monkhouse identified the three tasks which the Pennine Way Association must tackle - the first and easy step was to chose a route; the second was to fill the gaps in the route: and the third was to waymark it. Monkhouse recorded similar ideas from overseas - giving the Appalachian Trail and the German system of paths as examples - and noted that the waymarking of a route in North Wales had been attempted. This had been criticised by members of mountaineering clubs as being like "a continuation of the tram lines", although Monkhouse conceded that H. H. Symonds'

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1 ibid.

2 The Spectator vol 160, 25th March 1938, pp508-9.



response to this, that such a facility could introduce people to the art of finding footpaths for themselves, seemed sound.

However, Monkhouse had a hunch that the Pennine Way was not just to introduce the inexperienced to the Pennines and that: "the grouse moors of the south, apparently the obstacle of the plan, are in fact its *raison d'etre*."

"The Pennine Way is a fine new method of bringing the spur of popular opinion, for what that's worth, to bear on the landlords. It's an idea with excellent publicity value: simple, bold, graphic. You can get people to envisage the backbone of England, to run their finger down a map, to feel themselves pulled up with a jerk as they near the end of the sequence."<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Edale was planned as the southern terminus, rather than a point a further thirty miles (48 km) south at the real end of the Pennines, but thirty miles with no access problems, increased Monkhouse's suspicions.

Monkhouse summarised his doubts about the idea, suggesting for the first time a series of criticisms of long-distance routes which haunt their creation to this day. He noted that land-owners would not necessarily be appreciative of the merits of the idea; and he maintained that waymarked paths were not wanted in areas which are remote and potentially dangerous. He concluded:

"Walking on mountains seems to me a highly individual sport and one which repays apprenticeship. There is, I think, a danger of over-organising and over-simplifying it."

Further attention to the idea came, perhaps unexpectedly, from the Times. At the end of April 1938 a half-page photograph of Wild Boar Fell appeared, captioned 'From Peak to the Border - the Proposed Pennine Way'<sup>2</sup> and the plan was outlined. In fact, the photograph was taken some distance from where the route was planned, but it sparked off correspondence on the idea through April and May 1938, which,

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 26th April 1938, p20.

although it raised some criticism of the idea, brought important publicity.

The first letter, from J.D.Ellis, was in favour of the idea:

"It is greatly to be hoped that the splendid concept of a pedestrian right of way from the Peak to the Border embracing some, if not all, of the principal summits will soon be a reality through the active co-operation of landowners and local authorities."<sup>1</sup>

The correspondent had been impressed by the 'Hauptwanderstrecken' of Westphalia, a system of some fifty spine routes with side tracks, initiated by local organisations, allowing a considerable variety of alternative way-marked routes to be walked through the German woodlands. He suggested that the Federations of Rambling Clubs create a similar system in England, starting with the Pennine Way along the Backbone of England, and then developing subsidiary routes.

On the same day, a farmer from Westmorland declared himself to be apprehensive that such a scheme would cause considerable damage, particularly if walkers had dogs. Because of the cost involved, the correspondent did not want to see a made path, but "All the same, the track would have to be well-marked, preferably with painted posts as is the custom in Germany on the amenity routes, and even so a stranger<sup>2</sup> would find it hard to keep direction in a thick mist."

Stephenson replied to this correspondent the following week, reassuring him that the Pennine Way would be no paved track, and that it would be planned so as not to add to the difficulties of the local inhabitants, with information on the line of the route available in youth hostels and other public places and with facilities provided such as stiles to stop damage occurring to walls. Stephenson went on to say that he hoped land-owners would co-operate by dedicating new rights of way, and that:

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<sup>1</sup> The Times

<sup>2</sup> ibid.



"The interest already shown and the offers of assistance which have been received indicate that a Pennine Way from Kinder Scout to Muckle Cheviot would be a most popular and much appreciated innovation."<sup>1</sup>

Concerning waymarking, Stephenson declared that there would be considerable opposition to splashes of paint such as were found in Europe being used in the Pennines, and that he would prefer cairns to be used, as in the Lake District. This prompted a reply from Ellis, who had written the first, favourable, letter. He was adamant that cairns would represent "a positive danger", giving inexperienced walkers a sense of false security and leading them to further danger.

"It is greatly to be hoped that the Pennine Way, once it is surveyed and scheduled will be left severely alone, except for the inclusion of any new footpath on a one-inch Ordnance Survey Map."<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, he wished the scheme well, although he noted that a route along the crest of the Pennines would be impractical: "In common with all other hilly districts, the charm of the Pennines lies at least as much in crossing from dale to dale as in the actual summits."

The concern about despoilation of the hills through waymarking, cairning, the creation of new footpaths and the introduction of additional people has been a major criticism from outdoorsmen to the idea of long-distance routes, and can still be seen in the specialist climbing journals. Other correspondents with the Times expressed similar concerns. A woman wrote:

"For my part I would rather see this 'Pennine Walk' remain something of an adventure for the pedestrian explorer to discover for himself than exploited as a beauty spot for the tourist or made too easily accessible to the hiker."<sup>3</sup>

The following week a correspondent put his feeling more strongly:

"To anyone who really loves wild nature the modern 'spoon feeding', so dear to motorists and the fashionable 'hiker', is absolutely abhorrent. To steer one's way through the solitudes by following stream or ridges, or by aiming for distant landmarks, and even on occasion to be lost temporarily in mist, is actually, although doubtless only to

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<sup>1</sup> The Times 4th May 1938, p15d.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 24th May 1938, p17d.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 3rd May 1938, p12e.



those who understand their job properly, part of the fun of the fair.... Wild nature tamed and domesticated is no longer wild nature: man meddles only to mar."1

Stephenson replied to this in his second letter to the Times asserting that those who were concerned that the scheme would result in a crowded path did not take into account the scale of the Pennines. He maintained that the few more people one would be likely to meet (estimating a dozen between the Tees and the Eden) would be kindred spirits:

"Our aim is to establish a continuous right of way and to mark the route where necessary in the least objectionable manner. The erection of a few cairns on the desolate moors would still leave the following of the Pennine Way something of an adventure, and one only likely to be attempted by those genuinely fond of the wild and lonely places."2

He shifted attention by claiming that a greater problem was that of securing a continuous right of way, reporting that, to that end, volunteers were surveying the route and studying old maps and documents to ascertain the legal status of the route:

"At a later date land-owners will be approached with a view to obtaining the dedication of such new footpaths as may be necessary, and it is believed that there will be a sufficient number of public spirited land-owners to make possible this desirable walking route from Derbyshire to the Border."3

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In fact, it never came to the volunteers negotiating with land-owners. It is interesting to surmise what may have transpired if the ramblers had kept the creation of long-distance paths in their hands, but it was never a realistic possibility because, unlike the Appalachians or the Black Forest where trail-making by volunteers involved clearing and marking ways through forests of little economic value, in Great Britain land-use patterns were very different, with the use of even the remotest parts of the countryside for agriculture, sport and water collection, leading to a jealous guarding of rights by

1 The Times 13th May 1938, p12e.

2 The Times 17th May 1938, p12e.

3 ibid.

many land-owners. Moreover, footpaths in Great Britain were also covered by complicated laws. In addition there were problems with volunteers working on the Pennine Way because of their limited leisure time and resources and the remoteness of much of the route. The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted the surveying work being done on the line of the Pennine Way and, during the War, the route and other ambitions of the amenity campaigners became political issues, with pressure being increasingly applied to the Government to intervene in their creation.

The heritage of the Romantic period had led to the demand for access to and preservation of upland areas. The provision of cross-country paths had become a major demand of the amenity campaigners of differing interests, and the idea of the Pennine Way came at an opportune moment, embodying this Romantic heritage and providing a useful focus for the outdoor movement.

In fact, chance had played a large part in the inception of the idea of the Pennine Way, as has been shown, and it was T.A. Leonard who was largely responsible for nurturing the seed which Tom Stephenson had sown. The Conference in 1938, in Stephenson's words, changed the idea from "visionary idealism to a practical possibility" and the partnership between Stephenson and the Ramblers Association, embodied in the Pennine Way Association, created a well-thought out, well-publicised and realistic proposal by the outbreak of war.

As well as attracting the general support given from a wide variety of sources to cross-country paths, the Pennine Way had a particular number of strengths, both in its inception and in the idea itself. Stephenson was in a singularly strong position to publicise the idea, as Rambling Correspondent of the Daily Herald, and his being able to



revive the idea and give it considerable publicity around the time of the Conference at Hope was important. Leonard's position was also very strong within the amenity groups and his influence in getting the idea adopted by the Ramblers Association and in the creation of the Pennine Way Association was critical.

The Pennine Way Association was given credit for planning the line of the route, and this strengthened the standing of the idea, but in fact, although the subcommittees of the Association did particularly important work in surveying the sections of the route, there is no doubt that Stephenson was responsible for the detailed planning of most of the route. He knew the Pennines intimately and was able to make realistic and attractive proposals for the route and to describe the Way very appealingly.

The Appalachian Trail may have spawned the idea of the Pennine Way and was used to back it, but the American trail had very little influence on the development of the English route beyond the initial concept. The idea of the Pennine Way was from the first geared by Tom Stephenson to the unique British situation, and in many ways it reflects Stephenson himself, for it was to run through the area where he had done most of his early hiking and follow the sort of paths and link the sort of attractions he enjoyed. It also provided further ammunition for the fight for freer access, something Stephenson passionately believed in.

Monkhouse had perceived the strength of the plan as "an idea with excellent publicity value; simple, bold, graphic," and he had, of course, been right to point to the southern end of the Way as being of particular importance as far as many ramblers were concerned. However, the idea was also well-balanced, and the Pennine Way Association was quick to point out that three quarters of the route



was on existing rights of way, just as Stephenson had stressed that the plan was to follow as many existing paths as possible. It was not a blatant ploy to blackmail the land-owners in the southern Pennines to open up their moorlands. Such an exercise would undoubtedly have failed. Nevertheless, to the leaders of the ramblers it did represent another legitimate weapon in their campaign. The survey being carried out by the Pennine Way Association recognised that, of the 250 miles (400 km) of the Way, only 68 miles (109 km) had no track or right of way, although the hiker was excluded from only 52 miles (83 km). Of this, 30 miles (48 km) were at the south end of the route and, on purpose, this was left to last in the detailed fieldwork, so as not to risk a confrontation until the proposal had gathered sufficient<sup>1</sup> momentum.

Stephenson had been able to incorporate a number of topical themes into his discussions of the idea, such as the possibility of making it a lasting project of the Jubilee Fund, the argument that the Pennines should become a national park and the plea that the area's potential as a recreational resource be recognised. He also stressed continually the value of the idea to the physical and psychological health of the youth of the country. Moreover, he showed himself to be in a strong position not only to publicise the Way but also to reply to criticism and doubts about the idea, both in his capacity as a journalist and as Secretary of the Pennine Way Association.

A few criticisms of the idea were made publicly, but these seemed to disappear through the 1940s - to be revived in the 1950s when the idea once more became a realistic proposal for imminent development, rather than the political issue it had become. The criticisms included a concern over the opening-up of remote areas to inexperienced walkers, expressed, as today, mainly by mountaineering

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<sup>1</sup> Manchester & District Ramblers Federation Handbook op.cit. pp295-8.

interests. Indeed, a problem which occurred from the beginning in arguing the case of the Pennine Way (and, later, most of the other remoter long-distance routes) was that, to the user groups who jealously guarded their areas and to the land-owners and farmers along a route, the point had to be made that numbers of users of the routes would be small and those using the route would be well-behaved, committed and experienced. On the other hand, to get maximum publicity for the idea from the media, the likely popularity and use that would be made of such a facility had to be stressed.

Waymarking was a particular manifestation of this problem for it was recognised that it would be needed in some form in some parts of the Pennines. There was concern that the creation of a specific Pennine Way could lead to the experience of solitude and wilderness becoming lost, the presence of a path destroying the very thing people came to enjoy.

The problem in the 1930s was resolved satisfactorily - if temporarily - by considerable stress being laid on the "sympathetic" nature of the way-marking envisaged and the fact that any sort of made path which despoiled the area through which it passed would be as objectionable to the proponents of the idea as to its critics.

Another criticism was that, instead of strengthening the position of the ramblers in the southern Pennines, the Pennine Way might deflect attention from what was to many ramblers the main issues - the question of free access to the uncultivated uplands. However, as had been seen, Stephenson and others went out of their way to stress that the Pennine Way was envisaged as the precursor of free access and, in fact, Stephenson was known to the readers of the Daily Herald as a campaigner for full access. Moreover, veteran campaigners for access



such as G.B.H Ward and Edwin Royce publicly supported the idea of the Pennine Way.

There was a little criticism about the line chosen for the route, that it lacked in attractiveness along some parts. In fact, Stephenson had planned the route to take in a wide variety of scenic, historical, cultural and hiking interest. It would include some of the principal summits, but would not follow the watershed of the Pennines, which Stephenson felt would have been more monotonous and more dangerous. There were a few differences of opinion as to the precise routing of the Way, as would be expected at this stage. The route over Bleaklow was an example, with some wanting the route not to touch the wild expanses of the moor. A further minor criticism was that the Pennine Way was one of the Daily Herald press stunts. The idea rose above that possibility with its adoption by the Ramblers Association.

In general, there was widespread support for the idea of the Pennine Way once T.A. Leonard had given it his backing and, by the end of 1937, Stephenson was able to cite the idea as one of the major objectives of the Ramblers Association. The wide-ranging publicity for the idea in the Daily Herald, in the ramblers' journals and in the Times and other publications led to the idea becoming an established focus of many amenity campaigners and one with considerable public appeal. This had been achieved by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Other specific long-distance footpaths had been suggested, notably the Pilgrims' Way and a walk along the South Downs, but these had generally not been proposed as ends in themselves and there is no evidence of the ideas being followed up at this stage. Indeed, Stephenson in his article in Labour had felt that the Pennines were



the only place in England of sufficient size to accommodate such an idea, although he was later to make several additional suggestions.

The Pennine Way was thus the original idea for a formal long-distance path in Great Britain and Stephenson the instigator of the idea of this new type of recreational facility. In less than five years, between 1935 and the beginning of the war, the idea of the Pennine Way, and thus of long-distance paths in general, had passed its first two stages, the birth of the idea and its adoption by amenity campaigners. The next stage would be its inclusion as a generally-accepted component of a national recreational system and, because the ramblers were not to proceed with the idea of creating the facility themselves, its inclusion in legislation. The formalisation of the idea of long-distance paths, including the Pennine Way, is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE FORMALISATION OF THE IDEA OF LONG-DISTANCE FOOTPATHS  
1939 - 1947

1. INTRODUCTION

The Second World War had the effect of focussing attention on the possibility of a 'new beginning' for the government, the general public and interest groups alike in the period of reconstruction which would follow the war. Ideas and plans for the post-war period were developed for a wide range of social services during the war and immediately afterwards, including town and countryside planning. Not least, the preservation and enjoyment of the countryside continued to attract considerable attention.

The next two chapters trace the progress and development of planning for national parks and access to the countryside - for the two have become inextricably linked - in this period up to 1949. The provision of opportunities for long-distance walking routes is one aspect of this development, and the schemes put forward - the Pennine Way in particular - were to attract disproportionate attention and be increasingly at the fore of the campaign.

Central to this period was a series of official reports on countryside matters, and the Scott, Dower and the two Hobhouse Reports are examined in detail in this chapter. The submissions of the interest groups are also examined to suggest the influence they had and also to illustrate the development and growing acceptance of the ideas, particularly on long-distance footpaths. The government's reactions to the reports are also examined.

Of particular importance during this period were changes in the structure of the government, especially the creation at the end of 1942 of a separate Ministry of Town and Country Planning, so that for the first time amenity planning matters were placed high on the list

of responsibilities of a single department. The role of individuals within this department, notably John Dower, W.S. Morrison, Lewis Silkin and Tom Stephenson, is seen as being particularly critical, while chance is recognised as being significant in the developments of this period.

The period saw successes and disappointments for the campaigners, as the series of official reports gave support to the various demands of the pressure groups, but then as inactivity by a supposedly sympathetic government brought frustration. Finally, at the very end of the decade, many of the aspirations of the campaigners seemed to have been fulfilled with the passage of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The achievement of powers to establish long-distance paths was a major success, marking the formalisation of these as a component of the official countryside recreation system of England and Wales. Scotland was generally treated separately during this period and is the subject of Chapter 11 of this study.

## 2. THE SCOTT REPORT

### (a) Background

Of necessity, central government took control of many aspects of planning during the war and assumed responsibility for planning for post-war reconstruction. This is reflected in a flurry of reports on planning problems and these often exhibit a new holistic attitude to planning. The reports on Hill Sheep Farming are examples of this - even with limited terms of reference, the committees considered sheep farming and uplands in terms of national planning. One of the first of these reports was that of the Scott Committee on Rural Land Use, which covered a wide range of material. It was to be particularly influential and is examined below. This and other reports influenced the government, and the idea of Westminster taking a much more central

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<sup>1</sup> The Report of the Committee on Hill Sheep Farming in Scotland (Cmd 6494) and in England and Wales (Cmd 6498), 1944.



role in planning, both directly and through legislation, came out clearly in the 1944 Policy Paper on the Control of Land-Use.<sup>1</sup>

This White Paper is in fact concerned primarily with compensation and betterment, already examined by the Uthwatt Committee.<sup>2</sup> The recommendations of the Committee were not wholly accepted by the government and these problems were to continue to make difficulties for planning, including for national parks and associated facilities, throughout the period. However, the White Paper also criticised prewar planning as having been too localised and optional, and acknowledged that "the time has come to do something about this tricky issue in the light of post-war reconstruction." Moreover, assurances were given in the paper that part of an overall policy of reconstruction would provide for public enjoyment of the seaside and countryside.

This first formal government pledge to intervene directly in the provision of public enjoyment of the countryside as part of a national planning policy was also a result of pressure from amenity groups throughout the period. The broad approach which we have seen was a characteristic of the time applied equally to the amenity groups, and is illustrated in the titles of two papers published in 1941 and submitted to the government: 'Memorandum on Post-War Planning'<sup>3</sup> by the Commons Society and 'Proposed Post-War Country and Town Planning'<sup>4</sup> by the Ramblers Association.

One of the changes that came with the war was the imposition of some of the responsibilities for town and country planning for the period of reconstruction on the Ministry of Works and Building, rather than the Ministry of Health. Lord Reith was the Minister responsible, and in October 1941 he appointed Lord Justice Scott to head a

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Town & Country Planning The Control of Land Use Cmd 6537, June 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Expert Committee on Compensation & Betterment Cmd 6386, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> 13pp memorandum, September 1941.

<sup>4</sup> 'with particular reference to Access, National Parks and Footpaths', the title continued. 16pp memorandum, undated, probably end 1941.

committee to examine problems associated with rural industry, with the following terms of reference:

"To consider the conditions that should govern building and other construction developments in country areas consistently with the maintenance of agriculture, and in particular the factors affecting the location of industry, having regard to economic operation, part-time and seasonal employment, the well-being of rural communities and the preservation of rural amenity."<sup>1</sup>

The terms of reference were such that the Scott Committee was able to cover a very much wider field than rural industry, and in particular the phrase "the preservation of rural amenity" allowed the various amenity groups to use the Committee as a forum for airing their ideas - not least ideas on footpaths in the countryside.

(b) Submissions relevant to countryside enjoyment in general and footpaths in particular.

(1) The Commons, Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society

The Commons Society submitted to the Scott Committee their 'Memorandum on Post-War Planning' which had been originally submitted to Lord Reith in September 1941.<sup>2</sup> Recommendations included the stimulation of the use of the 1939 Access to Mountains Act, the establishment of national parks on the Addison model and the recording of rights of way. The Society's recommendations for the development of footpaths are, however, of particular interest.

There were now needs for special footpaths, the memorandum argued:

"One is the need, arising from the popularity of rambling and the growth of Youth Hostels organisation, for long-distance routes, making it possible to make continuous walking tours with practically no resort to roads. The suggested "Pennine Way" is an example of this class."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas (The Scott Report) Cmd 6378, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> The memorandum is reproduced in the Society's Journal vol VII 1941, pp61-81. An editorial in the same volume stressed that the policy of the "senior amenities society" was "evolutionary not revolutionary" (p53)

<sup>3</sup> ibid.



Coming from the Commons Society, that reference to the Pennine Way confirmed that the idea had indeed come of age and been accepted by the establishment of the amenity campaign.

Other footpaths should be created to viewpoints and in and around towns, the paper continued. "The Society is strongly of the opinion that all planning schemes should make adequate provision for walkers [and include] new cross-country paths, river and stream-side walks and access to special viewpoints."<sup>1</sup>

(11) The Ramblers Association

The Ramblers Association resubmitted its memorandum 'Proposed Post-War Country and Town Planning'.<sup>2</sup> It urged the establishment of a national planning framework, with a Ministry of Town and Country Planning and Regional Planning Committees, as well as a National Park Commission. Parks would be of two kinds - pastoral areas, like the Downs, and wilder areas. It also maintained that full access to open country was required.

A radical renewal of footpath legislation was needed, the Association maintained, and a supplementary memorandum argued that because many local authorities displayed a lack of interest in footpath matters, a National Footpath Commission was needed to administer a national right of way survey. The survey could use school children as the 1930s Land Use Survey had. The main memorandum argued that if local authorities were reluctant to carry out their responsibilities for maintaining footpaths, these should be transferred to a higher authority - for example - from Parish to Rural District Council, from R.D.C. to County Council, and from County

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Copy of this and supplementary memorandum in HLG 80/97 - Evidence 75  
(in the Public Records Office - PRO)



Council to Footpath Commission.

The memorandum suggested that two new sorts of footpath were needed - local paths and 'long-distance through routes' and it gave a list of examples of the latter: (i) the Pennine Way; (ii) a route along the Chilterns and the Berkshire Ridgeway continuing to Seaton Bay in Devon; (iii) the Pilgrims' Way; (iv) a route along the South Downs to Salisbury Plain; and (v) a footpath along Offa's Dyke. In addition, all 'unbuilt' sections of the coast should have rights of way, with the paths renewed following erosion; and rights of way should be created along the banks of all major rivers and canals.

Tom Stephenson was responsible for this list. Although he did not become an official of the Ramblers Association until 1943, in July 1941 he had put forward these proposals to the Southern Federation of the Association, to which he did belong.<sup>1</sup> This list was of particular importance for two reasons. Firstly, it was to dictate what was thought of as a long-distance route, there being no attempt at defining the idea during the period, and secondly, it was to provide the basis for the list of examples published in the Hobhouse Special Committee Report on Footpaths and Access, which in itself strongly influenced the programme of routes developed by the National Parks Commission after 1949.

Another particularly important point in the memorandum in respect of long-distance footpaths was the proposal that the National Footpath Commission should take responsibility for the paths, suggesting for the first time that it was recognised that these routes needed a higher body than the local authority to co-ordinate them.

The memorandum had put together a balanced programme for the preservation and development of the countryside and, because of this,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

and because the leaders of the Ramblers Association were to figure so prominently in the campaign during the period, the framework and many of the ideas presented in the report were to form the basis not only for discussion but also for what eventually was incorporated into the legislation.

(iii) The Pennine Way Association

Tom Stephenson, the Secretary of this Association, presented a particularly interesting discussion paper on the Pennine Way to the Scott Committee.<sup>1</sup>

Following a summary of the origin of the Pennine Way idea and a brief description of the route, Stephenson hinted at the criteria which led to the planning of the route and the proposals for its development. The aim was to link a variety of places of scenic and historical interest, rather than just taking the shortest distance between two points. Scarcity of accommodation was recognised as being a limiting factor. In addition, existing rights of way were used as much as possible and "The desired ideal is a continuous footpath with complete elimination of road walking."

The paper continued: "By a footpath is meant nothing more than a way trodden out by walkers and not an artificially surfaced path which would be as undesirable as a surfaced road." Similarly, Stephenson was against the use of blazes, preferring cairns to waymark upland sections, and simple signs in the valleys. The only improvements needed would be the construction of simple plank bridges across streams and stiles.

The paper also discussed possible objections to the idea. "There could be little objection on grounds of expense, for the total cost of

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<sup>1</sup> HLG 80/97 - S.C.Ev.75 Appendix, dated 11th March 1942 (PRO).



establishing the Pennine Way would probably be less than the expenditure on the construction of a few yards of modern motor road." The Association stressed that the route would not be harmful to the countryside and, on the contrary, would generate income for the rural people through catering for wayfarers. Grouse presented the only real problem, especially in the thirty-mile southern end of the route:

"The hills have been strictly guarded by gamekeepers who, in a number of well-authenticated instances, have resorted to violence and other deplorable methods in carrying out what they consider their duties."<sup>1</sup>

However, the Association claimed that the evidence showed that public access did not lead to a decrease in grouse, and Stephenson cleverly suggested a compromise: it would be better for land-owners to concede a few miles of footpath than to have to put up with trespass.

This is one of the reasons put forward as a need for such a provision: schemes like the Pennine Way would help avoid a repetition of the mass-trespases in the Peak District. Other reasons cited include the increase in motor traffic on the roads which had brought a considerable danger to pedestrians, and the great popularity of rambling:

"The Pennine Way would meet a very real need and be a boon to thousands of young people, and an encouragement to them to learn in the best possible way something of the geography and history and varied beauty of their native land. It would provide an escape to lonely heights and refreshing solitudes for many condemned to spend their working lives in mean cities and ugly towns."<sup>2</sup>

In fact the idea of a Pennine Way was supported not only by the Ramblers Association and the Commons Society, but also by the Youth Hostels Association and the Peak District and Northern Counties Footpath Society in their evidence. Moreover, in the Scott Committee's discussions, the Vice-Chairman, Dudley Stamp, in particular, seems to have been impressed by the idea and its support,

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.                      <sup>2</sup> ibid.



and , noting that the route had been surveyed by volunteers already, he suggested that maps be deposited with the Planning Section of the Ministry of Works - presumably for official action to be taken.<sup>1</sup>

The submission of the Pennine Way Association is of considerable relevance to this study. It provides the first discussion of the objectives and opportunities of a long-distance route scheme and is of great importance in illustrating the thinking that set the scene for long-distance paths in Great Britain. This is as near as it is possible to get to a statement of criteria used for planning and developing long-distance routes until the 1970s, and this paper and Stephenson's list of possible routes provided the foundations for the future system of long-distance routes in England and Wales.

However, although the Ramblers Association's ideas of giving a Footpath Commission responsibility for long-distance paths gave a hint of the concept of central co-ordination developing, no definite proposal for a method of establishing routes emerged from the submission of the Pennine Way Association.

The Pennine Way needed about seventy miles (112 km) of new rights of way, according to the survey by the Association. In fact, there had traditionally been no resistance to ramblers walking over some sixteen (26 km) of the seventy miles, but the paper argued that changing ownership, the development of new grouse moors or increased use by walkers could result in hikers being barred from this section in the future. The Association therefore pressed for a continuous right of way covering the whole 250 miles of the route and a list of the different means for securing this was offered:

- (a) through designation of areas as national parks which would open up tracts of uncultivated land in the Pennines;

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<sup>1</sup> HLG 80/97 Ev.71A - 19th March 1942 (PRO).

- (b) outside national parks through the implementation of an effective Access to Mountains Act;
- (c) on common land, by the application of the right of access provided for under Section 193 of the 1925 Law of Property Act to all rural commons;
- (d) through the acquisition of land by the Forestry Commission, which was said to be "sympathetic to the claims of walkers";
- (e) through "public-spirited" land-owners dedicating rights of way; or
- (f) through special planning legislation to create long-distance footpaths.

(iv) Joint Committee of Open-Air Organisations

In mid-March 1942 a delegation from the Joint Committee gave oral evidence to the Scott Committee <sup>1</sup>. It included representatives from the Camping Club, the YHA and the Ramblers Association. In fact, the file shows that the last was concerned that only three of its members could give evidence; others clearly wanted to, Professor Joad in particular. The Committee itself seemed to be disappointed not to have had Tom Stephenson present. <sup>2</sup>

The minutes show that the Committee was obviously sympathetic to the concerns of the delegation. Lord Scott himself said: "I think myself access is quite essential, even to the very best grouse moors", while Dudley Stamp suggested that more footpaths were needed in Great Britain on the Czech model, where waymarked mountain paths were served by youth hostels every fifteen miles or so. The Committee also took up the proposal by the Ramblers Association that a National Footpath Commission be created and they suggested during the discussion with the delegation that it should be a permanent body,

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p10.

composed of salaried officials, with members from ministries and interest groups, and that it should be responsible to a Minister of National Planning.<sup>1</sup>

(c) The Report of the Scott Committee

The Committee reported within a year, in mid-August 1942<sup>2</sup> and, as expected, the Report confirmed that the Committee had not felt itself constrained to study rural industry alone, having considered its central theme in a much wider context than perhaps a similar pre-war committee would have done. Of particular relevance to this study is the inclusion of a chapter on 'Preservation of the Countryside'.

In that chapter, the idea of the countryside being part of the heritage and thus the responsibility of the whole nation was advanced and "The principle that the countryside is the heritage of all involves the corollary that there must be facility of access for all."<sup>3</sup> Recommendations included the formation of a Central Planning Authority to control national parks for the report maintained that: "The establishment of National Parks in Britain is long overdue"<sup>4</sup> Emphasis was put on the planning and preservation of the coastline and on the control of behaviour of townspeople in the countryside, preferably by education.

The Committee made a number of recommendations for footpaths, which can be summarised thus:

(i) local planning authorities should have a statutory obligation to record, maintain and signpost rights of way, and to mark routes in hill country;

(ii) a small Footpath Commission should be established to investigate disputed rights of way:

<sup>2</sup> Cmd 6378, the Scott Report op.cit.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. para 175.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. para 178.      1 ibid. (Ev.71A)



(iii) the Commission should also have a duty to recommend the opening and closing of footpaths and bridleways and that such recommendations should be given legal effect by means of an order from the Central Planning Authority;

(iv) the old coastguards' path should be reopened for walkers round the whole of the coastline of England and Wales, except where this was impractical because of development, "in which case inland detours should be clearly indicated"<sup>1</sup>; and finally,

(v) "Main hikers highways such as the proposed Pennine Way" should be recognised.

This is the first mention of a specific long-distance route in an official report and, with the recommendations for the new powers to open footpaths, co-ordinated by a Footpath Commission, a workable system for the creation of such routes could have been established.

#### (d) Reactions to the Report

The Report was well received by the Press, the Manchester Guardian<sup>2</sup> commenting that it "has more life and colour than most state papers". The recommendations for a Footpath Commission and for long-distance routes were reported.

The amenity groups also welcomed the Report, even though it had taken a conservative line on access to uncultivated land. A newly-formed Joint Committee of the Commons Society and the Ramblers Association produced a 'Memorandum on the Report of Lord Justice Scott'<sup>3</sup> which favoured many of the recommendations and strongly supported both the revitalisation of the coastguards' path and the creation of a Footpath Commission. The paper also recommended that planning authorities should report to the Commission schemes for new footpaths, "including through routes for long-distance walkers such as

<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 176(6).

<sup>2</sup> Manchester Guardian 15th August 1942, p4a.  
<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in the Journal of the Commons Society, VII, 6, July 1943, ppl67-175. The Joint Committee had as its Joint Secretaries Humphrey Baker (Assistant Secretary of the Commons Society) and Tom Stephenson, newly appointed to the Commons Society Council as the YHA representative. ( See note overleaf)

footpaths, "including through routes for long-distance walkers such as the suggested 'Pennine Way' or for rambles of varying length within easy reach of towns."

Clearly the amenity campaigners had received a great and, in some ways, unexpected boost, with so many of their demands being incorporated as recommendations in the Scott Report - and they waited eagerly to hear the Government's reactions to these.

The Government, in fact, took sixteen months to react, mainly because of the complexity of the interdepartmental consultations<sup>1</sup> needed and instead of publishing a White Paper, the Government made a statement in the House of Commons which outlined what action was being taken on the large number (108) of recommendations in the Scott<sup>2</sup> Report. .

The statement affirmed the Government's general support for the recommendations for preservation and enjoyment of the countryside and agreed that natural beauty "must be of direct concern to national planning". This statement was interpreted by the amenity groups - somewhat prematurely as it turned out - as a declaration of intent by the Government.

### 3. THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL CONFERENCE ON FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEPATHS

#### (a) The Establishment of the Conference

A paper presented to the War Cabinet in September 1943 prior to the Government's statement, recorded interdepartmental discussions on the Scott Committee's recommendations for footpaths and access<sup>3</sup>. It concluded that:

<sup>1</sup> See Cherry op.cit. pp36-37.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1943-44 vol 395 cols 221-6, 30th November 1943.

<sup>3</sup> CAB 124/836, paper dated 27th August 1943, pp5/6 (PRO).

(Note from previous page: The forging of stronger links between the RA and the Commons Society represented a strengthening of the standing of the Ramblers Association).



"the most satisfactory line of approach would be an extension of ministerial powers to approve the creation, closure or alterations of footpaths. The question of footpaths cannot be suitably disassociated from related planning affecting the preservation of the countryside in general. Accordingly, the special recommendations for a separate footpath commission does not appear to be a sound one." <sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, there was support from the Board of Education for some of the Report's recommendations on access and W.S.Morrison, who had been appointed Minister Designate of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning at the very end of 1942, himself agreed that the situation in respect of footpaths was unsatisfactory. In addition, it seemed that Lord Scott had become frustrated by the Government's inaction and was pushing for some response to his Committee's recommendations.

Morrison reacted by establishing an Interdepartmental Conference to study the subjects of Footpaths and Bridlepaths. <sup>2</sup>

The Conference included representatives of the Home Office, War Office, and Ministries of Works, Agriculture, and Town and Country Planning, and it also acquired the services of Humphrey Baker of the Commons Society. Its duties included an examination of the recommendations for footpaths contained in Paragraph 176 of the Scott Report.

#### (b) Results

It seems that the Conference concentrated on compiling factual material concerning the law on rights of way in England and Wales. A letter written by John Dower in February 1946 stated that the Conference had been in abeyance for two years <sup>3</sup> which suggests that it in fact only functioned from the latter part of 1943 until early 1944. There

<sup>1</sup> ibid. (CAB 124/836)

<sup>2</sup> The actual timing of the establishment of the Conference is uncertain. it is possible that it was set up earlier than November 1943.

<sup>3</sup> HLG 71/1702, letter by John Dower, dated 28th February 1946, p2 (PRO).



was no reference to the Conference in the Journal of the Commons Society after its inauguration and there is little of relevance in the departmental files that bear the Conference title .

In the House of Commons in December 1944 Edmund Harvey MP asked Morrison about the recommendations on footpaths made in the Scott Report and was told that it was being considered by the Interdepartmental Conference and that the Minister was hoping for a report.<sup>2</sup> There is no record of a report being submitted to Morrison, although a 'Draft Report of the Interdepartmental Conference on Footpaths' did appear as evidence for the Hobhouse Special Committee<sup>3</sup> in 1947.

This short Draft Report spelt out the recommendations of the Scott Committee concerning footpaths and concluded that a Footpath Commission was unnecessary and that most of the recommendations were already covered by existing law. However, exceptions to this were the "hikers' highways" and the proposals for a coastal path and the Conference recommended that a future central authority for National Parks should plan these and be given any necessary powers, although it did not go into any greater detail.

It is interesting to note that the only positive suggestion to come from the Conference appears to have concerned long-distance paths, and in fact this was the first time that it had been proposed that a National Parks Commission (or whatever its title would be) should be responsible for such paths. Presumably the argument of the Scott Report, following the submission of the Ramblers' Association that such routes should be centrally co-ordinated, influenced the Conference and as they had rejected the idea of a Footpath Commission, a future Park Commission seemed an obvious alternative.

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/990/1 (PRO).

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1944-45 vol 406 col 1927, 21st December 1944.

<sup>3</sup> HLG 1707 FAC 2, undated but numbered 17/6/3 (PRO).

It is unclear whether this recommendation had any influence later, and in general the results of the Conference would seem to have been very disappointing. It contained representatives from a wide range of interests and a major opportunity to produce recommendations for a workable policy for the reform of footpath law seems to have been lost.

Certainly the Conference had the effect of stifling the Scott recommendations on footpaths, so that in some ways the Report of the Scott Committee represented a 'false start' at least as far as footpaths and access were concerned. Although there was to be progress in the development and consolidation of ideas, it was not until mid-1946 that there was another suitable official forum in which a framework for formulating a policy for the provision of footpaths over the whole of England and Wales, and not just national park areas, could be developed. That was to be the Special Committee on Footpaths and Access, chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse, which is examined later in this chapter.

Perhaps the main weakness of the Interdepartmental Conference was that it lacked the drive of a committed individual. In contrast, one man was taking on the subject of countryside preservation and the development of national parks in England and Wales, and his endeavours were to provide the basis for the policy eventually adopted by the government. His work was also to be of direct and indirect importance to the development and acceptance of the idea of long-distance footpaths. This was John Dower.

#### 4. THE DOWER REPORT

##### (a) Background

The 1939 Access to Mountains Act had not satisfied any of the amenity groups. It had been seen at first as a triumph for the



Commons Society which had been instrumental in its passage, but it covered only a small part of the Society's interests, and, as we have seen, the Society continued to press for a wide range of reform of countryside policy. User groups, exemplified by the Ramblers Association, saw the 1939 Act as a betrayal of their interests and continued to campaign even more strongly.

One group in particular had considerable influence both because it voiced the demands of a large spectrum of interest groups and because of the eminence of its leaders. This was the Standing Committee on National Parks, chaired by Norman Birkett. The Committee had prepared a draft National Park Bill in 1939<sup>1</sup> and a summary of this was sent to Lord Reith at the end of 1941<sup>2</sup>. Later, in April 1942, a delegation from the Standing Committee met Sir William Jowitt, the Paymaster General, and the latter's observation to Lord Portal, the new Minister of Works and Planning, is of interest, viz. that there was:

"a good cause for the establishment of Reserves, both from the point of view of preserving for posterity unspoilt samples of the countryside with their characteristic wild life and, from the more important cause of providing the means for public outdoor recreation."<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of this study the stress on the recreational aspect, coming from a Government minister, is of significance for two reasons. Firstly, in the obvious potential conflict between the preservation and the use of the countryside, it was to be the low-impact uses, such as long-distance walking, which were stressed to satisfy both sides. Secondly, the emphasis on the provision of recreational opportunities in the countryside was to continue to be a characteristic of ministerial pronouncements (including those of Morrison and Silkin), and the implicit attitude of the responsible ministers throughout the period seemed to be that the provision of national parks and of general access to the countryside were part and

<sup>1</sup> See Rickwood op.cit. pp368-383. Clause 7 was aimed at reforming foot-paths and bridleways in national parks.

<sup>2</sup> See Cherry op.cit. pp28/9.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. p31.



parcel of the same issue and therefore should be dealt with together.<sup>1</sup> This was the sentiment of the Cabinet paper of September 1943 and the intention of both Morrison and Silkin later in the decade to produce comprehensive legislation for countryside amenity is indicative of this. Although the main deliberations in the middle of this period concern the establishment of national parks, progress in this direction nevertheless greatly affected the standing of the campaign for the development of facilities for recreation in the countryside - the fate of ideas for such facilities as long-distance footpaths was closely tied to the fate of national parks.

(b) The Dower Study

As a result of the pressure from the amenity groups, Reith had encouraged the Scott Committee to examine the problems of countryside amenities, but it was soon clear that this in itself was not enough. An examination of how national parks would fit into the planning framework was clearly required, for example, and there was a real need to develop criteria for use in the discussions on national parks. An example of the lack of general consensus of opinion on fundamental issues came out in a May 1942 departmental note, in which H.G. Vincent, Principal Assistant Secretary of the Planning Division of the Ministry of Works and Building, wrote of an interdepartmental meeting which discussed national parks:

"Some doubts were expressed about the Peak District. For my part I regard it as more truly regional and not possessing wildness and loneliness for recreation on a wide scale."<sup>2</sup>

In fact Vincent recommended that John Dower, in 1942 an Assistant Secretary at the Ministry, should prepare a report on national parks,<sup>3</sup> based on a survey of possible areas for such parks. Dower had been appointed to the Standing Committee on National Parks in 1936 and had been instrumental in producing the Committee's manifesto, 'The Case

<sup>1</sup> See Section 3(a) above.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 92/46 - note 13th May 1942 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> ibid. note 19th May 1942.

for National Parks in Britain' (of which some 40,000 copies had been distributed)<sup>1</sup>. It was Dower who had been largely responsible for writing the draft National Parks Bill in 1939.

John Dower's Report was to be the keystone of this crucial period of national park history in England and Wales. However, the departmental files show clearly how chance played a very large part in the production and eventual publication of the Report. The significance of the final report and its impact had not been foreseen by the senior civil servants when Dower began his study. In July 1942 the Deputy Secretary of Planning warned: "We don't want Mr Dower to make a big job of this report,"<sup>2</sup> and, in fact, Dower was to admit that the Report turned out to be twice as long as he had expected. It also took considerably longer than had been expected, partly because of Dower's health.

Dower supplemented his field work with his considerable knowledge and expertise of the issues central to amenity planning in England and Wales, but he did not formally examine witnesses. He seems to have had something of a special position in the Department and was given a relatively free hand, although there is evidence of early editing of the Report. L.E. Neal, Deputy Secretary of the Planning Department, for example, in a critique of the first instalment of the Report, stressed the need to cultivate the goodwill of a number of departments and was concerned that "a number of times Mr Dower hits out unnecessarily" and was "over-enthusiastic". He continued:

"It would be a pity if so fine an effort were to be handicapped through a certain lack of constraint here and there. Would Mr Dower please use his blue pencil in this regard... I don't think the Report will lose anything in individuality, and it should gain notably in persuasiveness."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Rickwood op.cit. Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 92/46 - note 11th July 1942 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> HLG 93/55 - note 29th March 1943 (PRO).



(c) Deliberations before Publication

At a meeting in September 1943<sup>1</sup> by which time Dower's first draft had been examined by the Department, it was agreed that the Report should be published in the form of a White Paper by John Dower. It was argued that for it to be an official Departmental paper the Minister would have to be in agreement with all the recommendations and would be committed to them, and this was not possible. Dower was to put this suggestion forward again towards the end of 1944 in an attempt to get the Report published. He noted that, although it would be unusual for a report by a civil servant to be in the first person, the Reports of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health<sup>2</sup> provided a precedent.

However, even with this safeguard, interdepartmental consideration of the Report was to be extremely time-consuming. The Ministry of Agriculture in particular caused delays and Dower complained of its "general (if misguided and untenable) objections to early publication"<sup>3</sup> The Treasury and the Ministry of Health were also concerned about some of the content of the Report, and there was also some resistance to publishing from within the Ministry, now the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.

It remained for pressure from outside the Government Departments to push for the publication of Dower's Report. The amenity groups continued their lobbying and, for example, in December 1944 the Standing Committee on National Parks published a discussion document<sup>4</sup> entitled 'National Parks - their creation and Administration.

<sup>1</sup> ibid. Report of Meeting of 15th September 1943.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 93/56 - letter by John Dower dated 25th October 1944 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> This paper stressed the importance of cross-country walking in national parks.



Moreover, the campaigners were now able to argue that a number of Ministers, including Lord Portal, Strauss, Jowitt and Morrison,<sup>1</sup> had pledged themselves in speeches to act to preserve the countryside, and the campaigners demanded that the Dower Report be published and implemented.

The existence of the Dower Report was confirmed in 1944 at a Summer School in St. Andrews,<sup>2</sup> while answers to two Parliamentary questions in October 1944 also confirmed the study, virtually committing the Minister to publish the Report.<sup>3</sup> It was, in fact, in Parliament where the major pressure was applied, notably by Sir Geoffrey Mander who initiated an adjournment debate on national parks in March 1945.<sup>4</sup> In this the importance of long cross-country footpaths for holiday makers was asserted. Mander also asked questions about the Report in January, March and April 1945.

There were still objections to publishing the Report at the War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee meeting on 7 May 1945, but Morrison was to go ahead and, in the middle of the month, the Report 'National Parks in England and Wales'<sup>5</sup> was published.

#### (d) The Report

Like the Addison Report over a decade before, the Dower Report was to be the starting point for all discussion on national parks and the preservation of the countryside for a long time to come. As has been suggested previously, because the development of footpaths was to be so closely linked to the fortunes of the national park campaign, it was the repercussions of the Report which were to be as important as the contents. However, Dower did discuss footpaths specifically at

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in paragraph 1 of the Dower Report (Cmd 6628).

<sup>2</sup> HLG 93/54 note (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1943-44 vol 403 cols 2381-2 & 2535, 18th & 19th October 1944.

<sup>4</sup> HC Reports 1944-45 vol 409 cols 774-782, 20th March 1945.

<sup>5</sup> John Dower National Parks in England and Wales (The Dower Report) Cmd 6628 1945.

<sup>1</sup>  
some length, and what he had to say was to be of direct relevance to the development of ideas.

In national parks, "three main forms of facilities are demanded and required," he maintained, "ample accommodation; full access for rambling over uncultivated land; and plenty of footpaths through cultivated land."<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that footpaths and access to open country could have a far wider application than just in national parks, although it was these areas that were most likely to generate the most pressure. "It will, to a large extent, be by their success or failure in securing ample provision of rambling access that the National Park Authority will be judged"<sup>3</sup>.

The Report examined the relationship between rambling and farming, grouse shooting and water supply catchment. In the first, Dower maintained that "there is no major conflict of interest" and that there were in fact advantages to the farming community, with income to be derived in providing accommodation and refreshments for ramblers. He made similar points to those in the Scott Report about behaviour of townspeople in the countryside, advocating tighter control and education.<sup>4</sup> As regards shooting, Dower had the following to say:

"Where the issue is seen as a broad question of principle -whether the recreation needs of the many should or should not outweigh the sporting pleasures of the few - there can be little doubt of the answer: that walkers should and sooner or later will be given freedom of access over grouse moors"<sup>5</sup>

However, Dower conceded that the problem was more difficult regarding water catchment and the problem would need a "sustained effort" to be resolved. This topic had been at the fore of the disagreements with the Ministry of Health during the Interdepartmental deliberations, and Dower had clearly had to water down his arguments for virtually complete public access to these areas. Nonetheless, he concluded that

<sup>1</sup> ibid. paras 39-59.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. para 35.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. para 50.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. para 41.

<sup>5</sup> ibid. para 45.



when "misunderstandings have been cleared away, the real difficulties can be faced and will not, in my opinion, prove insurmountable."<sup>1</sup>

Dower proceeded to criticise the current situation of footpaths in the countryside: "There is no question that the present provision is radically unsatisfactory in most parts of the country," he maintained.<sup>2</sup> The Report advocated

"a thorough recasting of footpath law and administration, followed by a systematic nationwide campaign to provide, record, equip and maintain an ample extent of public footpaths in all districts."<sup>3</sup>

However, Dower maintained that it was beyond the scope of his study to recommend the form of administration and the powers needed, although there is evidence that he considered this. At a Departmental meeting in September 1943, at which Dower's first draft was discussed, the question of the administration of footpaths was covered. The Secretary felt that to have one set of authorities responsible for footpaths - "as advocated in the Report" - would be unsuitable. Dower conceded that a variety of authorities could undertake the administration, but maintained that oversight was needed by one department or central planning authority. Yet although the local authorities might have responsibility for ordinary footpaths, "an exception might be made in the case of proposed long-distance routes" - implying that their creation could be the responsibility of a central body.<sup>4</sup> Dower did not follow this up in the final Report.

The idea of long-distance routes was supported in the Report, although they were not examined as a subject in themselves. In his paragraph on paths in national parks, Dower considered that continuous cliff-edge paths was "an outstanding requirement"<sup>5</sup> In addition, in his paragraph on supplementing the existing system of footpaths, he maintained that both planning and highway authorities should jointly consider local, regional and national footpath schemes, and that the

<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 49.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. para 54.      <sup>3</sup> ibid. para 45.

<sup>4</sup> HLG 93/55 op.cit. - Minute of the 20th Meeting of the Secretary, 8th September 1943.

<sup>5</sup> The Dower Report op.cit. para 53.



first instalment of these "should include schemes for the 'Pennine Way' and other long-distance walking routes referred to in the Scott Report".<sup>1</sup>

It is unfortunate that Dower's final Report did not give any indication of his views on the administration of long-distance footpaths, other than that noted above, because it is likely that it would have illustrated a significant development in the idea. Had Dower examined footpaths in more detail there may also have been an attempt made at defining 'long-distance' footpaths, and perhaps a systematic discussion of the concept paralleling that on national parks.

(e) Reaction of the Government

In fact developments took place before the actual publication of the Report. A departmental minute at the beginning of 1945 noted:

"By a coincidence we have now received an intimation from the Minister which indicates that he attaches importance to the whole matter. On his instructions a letter has gone to the Secretary of the Legislation Committee, stating that it is our hope to get through this Session a Bill for National Parks and for the Control of Advertisements 'if it turns out to be at all possible to do so'"<sup>2</sup>

Dower had already noted Morrison's personal interest in his study<sup>3</sup> and, on seeing the note, he wrote immediately to G. S. Pepler, the Principal Assistant Secretary, stating that he was against the idea of having a Bill before a White Paper, especially as there had not yet been consultations and as compensation was still a burning issue.<sup>4</sup>

Dower followed this up with an eight page handwritten letter in which

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 57.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 93/56 Minute, Neal to Pepler dated 2nd January 1945. In fact, a note at the end of November 1944 had indicated that the Secretary had asked E.S.Hill (a Principal Assistant Secretary) to prepare legislation for national parks - see HLG 93/56 note 24th November 1944 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> ibid. (HLG 93/56) letter from Dower dated 1st January 1945.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. letter from Dower dated 4th January 1945.

he asserted that advertisements and national parks were "mutually<sup>1</sup> damaging bedfellows in a shared Bill"

At a high level departmental meeting to discuss the legislative programme for 1945, the senior civil servants argued against legislation for national parks at that time, using Dower's reasoning - but also saying that it would deflect from "wider and more important<sup>2</sup> problems, such as the provision of Green Belts and Open Spaces" giving further indication that the idea was held in relatively low esteem by the senior civil servants. At the end of the month the Minister concurred with the recommendation to postpone legislation.

However, John Dower produced an alternate strategy that the Minister should seek to establish, by Order in Council under Section 8 of the 1943 Town and Country Planning Act, a Preparatory National Park<sup>3</sup> Commission to pave the way for legislation. This request was presented to the War Cabinet Reconstruction Committee at the beginning<sup>4</sup> of May 1945 attached to the Dower Report. Because the Commission would be largely independent and would be deeply involved in fundamental questions of "acute political controversy", it was suggested that, instead of a Commission, a committee should be appointed by Morrison to examine the Dower Report.

Morrison immediately did this, and the Dower Report thus led directly to the establishment of a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse in 1945.

## 5. THE HOBHOUSE COMMITTEE

### (a) The Committee

The Committee's terms of reference were, in effect, to review the Dower Report and Morrison hoped that the Committee would report in

<sup>1</sup> ibid. letter from Dower dated 6th January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. Minute 19th January 1945, comment by E.S.Hill.

<sup>3</sup> HLG 92/49 draft memorandum dated 5th March 1945.

<sup>4</sup> See Cherry op.cit. p49.



twelve months - and that legislation would follow "forthwith".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Committee was weighted with members sympathetic to the Commons Society and the Standing Committee on National Parks and included John Dower himself. It might therefore have been expected that the Committee would have made rapid progress; but in fact it took two years, not one, to report, and this was in part because a considerable number of bodies wished to present evidence.

Partly because of the way the request for evidence was phrased, most of the respondents concentrated on giving their reactions to the Dower Report. The evidence is not discussed here because much of that relevant to footpaths was also presented to the Special Committee on Footpaths and Access and evidence to that body is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

(b) The Hobhouse Report

The full Hobhouse Committee reported in July 1947<sup>2</sup> and the majority of its recommendations were to provide the basis for subsequent legislation. Matters relating to footpaths and access had been delegated to a Special Committee following the broadening of the full Committee's terms of reference in June 1946, but in fact a chapter in the Hobhouse Report was also devoted to these topics.

"The simplest, cheapest, and, in most respects, the healthiest way of enjoying a National Park will be the way of the rambler, and all possible facilities must be provided for his accommodation and convenience"<sup>3</sup>

the Report maintained and it considered the variety of footpaths there should be in national parks. A list of a great variety of recreational footpaths and bridleways of varying length was presented<sup>4</sup> and this included clifftop and seashore paths, which were emphasised:

<sup>1</sup> HLG 93/57 note (PRO) See also Cherry *op.cit.* p49.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales) Cmd 7121 (The Hobhouse Report), 1947.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. para 210.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. para 296.



"Indeed, a coastal path by cliff, bay, dune, beach and estuary, round the whole of England and Wales, broken only where urban development or impassible features intrude, is not beyond conception as an objective of coastal planning."<sup>1</sup>

This would presumably be a function of the Coastal Planning Advisory Committee which the Report recommended.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting that the coastal footpaths were still being considered separately from 'Long-Distance Paths', which were discussed on their own. The Committee attached "importance to the provision of long-distance paths and bridleways in and between National Parks and Conservation areas"<sup>3</sup> and the Report gave a list of possible routes, similar to that submitted by the Ramblers' Association to the Scott Committee - the Pennine Way, Ridgeway, Pilgrims' Way, South Downs Path, Offa's Dyke and the Roman Wall. It concluded:

"This provision for the vigorous enjoyment of walking and riding through the unspoilt countryside of England and Wales should be regarded as an important adjunct to the National Park scheme"<sup>4</sup>

In assessing the prominence of long-distance paths in the Report, it should be noted that Tom Stephenson was assisting the Committee in the months before it reported. He is recorded in a minute in June 1946<sup>5</sup> as saying that he believed the Ramblers' Association would not press for a separate Footpath Commission which had been advocated in their evidence, if a government department was given overall responsibility<sup>6</sup> for footpaths. He also wrote a memorandum for the Hobhouse Committee which included, inter alia, a discussion on long-distance footpaths. He noted in this that, because the Pennine Way would pass through eight counties, some central coordination would be needed to secure continuity. In fact, the Report did not recommend a coordinating agency for long-distance routes, but it did give them fair prominence.

<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 263.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. para 265 (proposed following the coastal survey by J.A.Steers).

<sup>3</sup> ibid. para 300.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> HLG 71/1702 - NPC 66 Minute of 5th June 1946 (PRO).

<sup>6</sup> ibid. NPC 65 (8-page memorandum).

## 6. THE DELEGATION OF THE RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION

The Labour Party's landslide election victory in the summer of 1945 brought a new Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin, who was known as a supporter of the amenity cause. Silkin had, for example, spoken at a rally on Leith Hill to oppose restrictions in the Access to Mountains Bill in 1938. Tom Stephenson had also been a speaker at that meeting, which was organised by the Southern Area of the Ramblers' Association. From 1943 Stephenson had been Press Secretary at the Ministry and, shortly after Silkin's appointment, the Minister asked to see him. This resulted in the two of them spending an afternoon discussing the Ministry's programme for national park and amenity.<sup>1</sup>

One outcome of the meeting was that Silkin learned that the Ramblers' Association had asked that he receive a deputation from them, a request that had never reached the Minister. Silkin readily agreed to a meeting, which took place in mid-December. It is significant that the Minister's brief for the meeting included a note on long-distance paths as one of five items for discussion.<sup>2</sup>

The delegation<sup>3</sup> met Silkin and his staff on 12 December 1945, and afterwards Stephenson was responsible for the Ministry issuing a press release which went a long way to committing Silkin to legislate on amenity matters. An article in the Manchester Guardian the following day, for example, was headed 'The Minister Agrees With Ramblers - New Legislation Needed' - although it did concede that he had not been hopeful of immediate legislation.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Stephenson has maintained that Silkin did in fact promise legislation "within the lifetime of that Parliament", a promise he was to be reminded of by the campaigners later.<sup>5</sup> The article in the Manchester Guardian stated

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 71/990 - note of 8th December 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Comprising of Joad, Barnes, Ritchie, Mitchell and Shelton. See Rucksack vol 3,4, October 1966, p10.

<sup>4</sup> Manchester Guardian 13th December 1945, p5d.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Stephenson op.cit.



that ideas like free access, drastic revision of footpath law, a Footpath Commission and long-distance routes, such as the Pennine Way and coastal path, had been put to the Minister, and "Mr Silkin in reply said he was in full sympathy with almost everything that had been said."

#### 7. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE FOOTPATHS & ACCESS

Just how much influence Stephenson and this delegation did have on Silkin can only be surmised. However, in February 1946 Dower wrote:

"It is known to senior officers of the Ministry that it is the intention of the Minister to introduce in the 1947-48 Session a Comprehensive Amenities Bill covering National Parks, Footpaths and Access etc...'<sup>1</sup>

The situation in respect of national parks was by now fairly clear, Dower maintained, continuing:

"The position on the other subject, Footpaths and Access to Mountains, is in sharp contrast and frankly alarms me. Virtually no current work is being done on either subject; and, more serious, no method or programme of work has been determined or even proposed. Moreover, the past work on the Ministry's files does not provide any foundation comparable with the Dower Report .. the practical side has been inadequately explored and the forward view is sketchy, loose-ended and inconclusive."<sup>2</sup>

Dower therefore proposed that the Hobhouse Committee be asked to examine these topics throughout the whole countryside. He recognised that there could be problems in extending the Committee's terms of reference but could see no alternative, given the time constraint. He added that, because of the possible controversial nature of the subjects, an 'outside' report would be to the Minister's advantage.<sup>3</sup>

J.B.Bowes took up Dower's points in a memorandum in March, referring to footpath and access matters as "a thorny and tangled problem"<sup>4</sup> and Dower immediately responded with practical suggestions for the study. He was of the opinion that, because of the depth of work needed and the shortage of time, a small subcommittee ought to be established,

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<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1702 op.cit. 5page memorandum, dated 28th February 1946.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. <sup>3</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. memorandum dated 5th March 1946.



backed by professional staff. He suggested a group of six - Lord Chorley as Chairman, Sir William Gavin, Chief Agricultural Adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries ("to keep M.A.F sweet")<sup>1</sup> and himself from the full Hobhouse Committee, and three others including Francis Ritchie, Assistant Secretary of the Ramblers Association, "the most able and level-headed of the younger Ramblers Association and Commons Society people, and a real expert on practical footpath matters."<sup>2</sup> Dower suggested that his own Report would make a good starting point for the study because most of his recommendations had been generally accepted by the Government Departments.

The proposal was discussed during March 1946, with the objections to a Footpath Commission once more being stressed. For example, P.T. Mansfield (the Administrative Officer) wrote to A.B. Valentine (Principal Assistant Secretary) stressing his objection to such a Commission in future legislation: "Footpaths ought not to be magnified into a central and national problem."<sup>3</sup>

Silkin agreed to the study, conceding that, because of the limited time available, a small group of "knowledgeable individuals who had not been too prominently associated with any particular aspect" should be appointed, although he would have preferred "a small committee of independent persons not previously identified in the public eye with any special aspect of the subject matter of the investigation and without preconceived views."<sup>4</sup>

Tom Stephenson was nominated to be the Secretary of the Subcommittee and, at Hobhouse's request, he presented suggestions for terms of reference, at the beginning of May.<sup>5</sup> However, at the end of May, Valentine wrote an important letter to Hobhouse:

<sup>1</sup> ibid.                      <sup>2</sup> ibid. memorandum dated 7th March 1946.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. memorandum dated 12th March 1946.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. letter, Valentine to Hobhouse dated 26th March 1946.

<sup>5</sup> ibid. note, Stephenson to Valentine dated 2nd May 1946.

"Mr Tom Stephenson has just been talking to me. He is worried about his present position. He feels that he has been so prominent and well-known, and so clearly identified with a definite point of view on questions of access, that he cannot reconcile the need in his capacity of secretary of the Footpath and Access Committee to preserve the position of complete impartiality which is expected and required of civil servants. He fears also that the Committee may be weighted against the amenity enthusiasts, and likely to produce a Report to which he, at any rate, could not subscribe. He has in mind particularly that, as you know, John Dower is at the moment a very doubtful starter."<sup>1</sup>

Valentine then went on to propose that Stephenson should become a private member of the Committee but that "he continue to supervise and help in his civil servant capacity exactly as he is doing at present." This arrangement was agreed to by Silkin and Hobhouse.

Appointing the Chairman of the Subcommittee had proved to be a problem. Dower had originally proposed Lord Chorley but he declined because of overwork. Dower's health precluded him and Gavin seemed set to take the chair. However, Silkin indicated his dissatisfaction with this<sup>2</sup> and eventually Sir Arthur Hobhouse himself agreed to be the Chairman.

## 8. THE HOBHOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE

### (a) The Committee

The Committee was formally nominated and a press notice issued on 1 August 1946. The formation of the Committee was widely reported and an editorial in the Times commended the Minister on having created such a balanced Committee for the "very delicate job" with which it was entrusted. In fact, it was established as a Subcommittee of the full Hobhouse Committee and the intention was that its report would be incorporated in the Report of its parent body. However, later it was given Special Committee status, with power to report directly to the Minister. For convenience it is referred to here as a Committee throughout its life.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. letter, Valentine to Hobhouse dated 23rd May 1946.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. letter, Valentine to Hobhouse dated 26th March 1946.



The terms of reference required the Committee to examine (i) the preservation and maintenance of existing rights of way; (ii) the provision of new rights of way; (iii) the provision of long-distance and coastal footpaths; and (iv) public access to uncultivated land.

Members from the full Hobhouse Committee were Hobhouse himself; L.K. Elmhirst (leader of the Dartington Hall experiment in estate management), the Vice-Chairman; Lt.Col.Buxton (who represented the interests of the Commons Society); Dower and Gavin. Gavin, in fact, resigned at the beginning of 1947, to be replaced by the former Deputy Chairman of the Scott Committee, Dudley Stamp. Co-opted members were Elwyn Jones (the nominee of the National Farmers Union), Lord Merthyr (like Hobhouse, a major landowner with amenity interests), G. A. Wheatley (representing the county councils) and the two representatives of the amenity groups. Ritchie was indicated in the press release as being a member of the Executive Committees of both the Ramblers Association and the Commons Society. Stephenson also occupied these positions, but this fact was omitted from the press release which credited him with being the editor of Out of Doors, Secretary of the Pennine Way Association and a member of the Executive Committee of the Youth Hostels Association. Stephenson had indeed become a most influential figure in the amenity world by the mid-1940s as well as being in a critical position in the Ministry. The importance of the Ramblers Association in representing the amenity cause should also be noted - Ritchie and Stephenson were primarily Ramblers Association representatives and, in addition, John Dower was by this time the President of the Association. The Committee had turned out to be very much more strongly representative of the amenity lobby than seemed likely at one stage.



A conference of the members was held at the beginning of July 1946, in anticipation of the creation of the Committee. For this Stephenson provided a package of seven items<sup>1</sup> which included the Dower Report, a brochure of the Ramblers Association 'We Demand the Freedom of the Hills', a memorandum by Stephenson outlining the problems in hand, and an offprint from Out of Doors on the Pennine Way<sup>2</sup>, reviewing the route and giving an account of a trek from Malham to Wooler.

(b) Evidence

Evidence submitted to the main Hobhouse Committee was used as well as its notes and minutes, but the Special Committee itself solicited comment - and received a very large amount. Just as the impression from reviewing the evidence submitted to the main Hobhouse Committee is that there was a general feeling that national parks were inevitable, so the impression here is that reform of the provision of footpaths and access was imminent, and that it was therefore up to the interest groups to press their cases in an attempt to mould what would be an influential report. The British Field Sports Society, for example, submitted a ten-page paper, stating its concerns within the general presumption that footpaths and access ought to be more freely available.<sup>3</sup> The Central Landowners Association called for simplification of existing laws on footpaths, while the National Farmers Union pressed for local authorities to have more responsibilities for paths.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Land Agents, in a joint memorandum, were also responsive to the idea of change and went so far as proposing that cliff-top paths should be established - and replaced if eroded.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Town Planning Institute, in its evidence to the main Hobhouse Committee, proposed the creation of

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1706 - FAC 1 (PRO).

<sup>2</sup> Out of Doors Autumn 1945.

<sup>3</sup> HLG 71/1707 op.cit. FAC Ev11.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. FAC Ev19.

a network of walking and riding routes under national protection,<sup>1</sup> linking the 'Dower areas' with towns and these two recommendations were indicative of the general acceptance of the idea of special footpaths. It is not just the amenity groups which were advocating such facilities by now.

This was to be the critical period for the various amenity groups to press their claims, for the decisions made in these latter years of the 1940s were to be incorporated into legislation, which had the effect of fossilising the machinery for creating facilities for countryside recreation for the following twenty years or so.

The cyclists' lobby seemed to be particularly weak and, as a consequence, no special provisions were made for them. The Cyclist Touring Club, their main organisation, declined to offer oral evidence to the full Hobhouse Committee. The canoeing lobby did make representations to the Special Committee but its voice was too late and too weak, and the lobby did not have an ally on the Committee. In fact, given the parallels between the canoeists' claims for increased access to water bodies and improved rights of way on rivers and other water bodies<sup>2</sup> and those of the ramblers' lobby it is perhaps<sup>3</sup> surprising that there was so little support for their cause. Presumably this was because of the intricacies of the law relating to the use of waterways, as well as the lack of volume of support.

Horse-riders fared a little better, but this was because 'rights of way' considered in detail by the Committee included bridleways, and not because of any strong support. The Ancient Order of Pack Riders did suggest to the full Hobhouse Committee that "It would be a great boon to riders not only to be able to make circular tours but also ride across the Parks in various directions."<sup>4</sup> but the Institute of

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1702 op.cit. NPC Ev14.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 71/1704 - FAC Ev3 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> See pages 42-43 of the Report (Cmd 7207).

<sup>4</sup> HLG 93/44 - NPC/EV 36.

the Horse and Pony Club wrote that it had no evidence to offer the Committee, and no specific facilities were to be proposed in the Report for riders.

It was the sheer size of the 'foot lobby' together with its history of campaigning and the political nature of its demands, which made it dominate the user lobby. However, it is interesting to speculate that, had these non-pedestrian groups put forward attractive and realistic schemes - for example, for long-distance cycling, trekking or canoeing routes, which could catch the public attention as the idea of the Pennine Way and coastal path had done - and had campaigned to get these adopted in the various official reports, there may have been rather more provision in the subsequent legislation for facilities other than for ramblers.

Local amenity groups, mainly the local clubs of the Holiday Fellowship and CHA, inundated the Special Committee with letters in support of provisions for footpaths and access, with letters coming from as far afield as Dundee, Cardiff, Eccles and Bristol.<sup>1</sup> Many of the submissions of the rambling lobby were of a professional and convincing nature such as the submissions of the Peak District and Northern Footpath Preservation Society and individuals such as Phil Barnes, as well as the submissions of the Ramblers Association. Groups such as the YHA stressed the widespread popular support they enjoyed. The YHA, in fact, also noted in its evidence the value of long-distance footpaths to hostellers and suggested that such paths should be planned to connect hostels.<sup>2</sup>

The Ramblers Association produced one of the most important submissions, covering a number of key topics from water catchment areas<sup>3</sup> to 'Country Footpaths'.<sup>4</sup> In respect of the latter it argued

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1705 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> HLG 71/1707 - FAC EV 12.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 71/1704 op.cit.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. FAC EV 9.



that three new types of footpath were required: (i) paths to complete links in local networks, including from town to country; (ii) paths to viewpoints, those linking open spaces and those providing alternatives to highways; and (iii) long-distance routes.

The last was covered in detail. It was asserted that long-distance paths were analagous to national parks in that they served a national need. They should therefore be centrally co-ordinated and grant aided, with either the central body assuming responsibility for creating them or designated local authorities being given a subsidy to create them. The negligible cost was stressed and the avoidance of<sup>1</sup> motor roads was brought out as a critical planning factor.

The recommended routes were the coastguard path ("the long-distance path par excellence ... we can envisage no single project likely to cause more pleasure and enjoyment"), the "magnificent" Pennine Way, the Chiltern/Ridgeway route, the Pilgrims Way, a South Downs route, one along Offa's Dyke and one along the Roman Wall. The<sup>2</sup> list was based on that submitted to the Scott Committee, with the addition of the specific recommendation that the coastguard path be a long-distance route and the proposal for a route along Hadrian's Wall.

Rights of way should also be created along the principal rivers and canals, the paper continued, and another group of shorter 'long-distance paths' was needed to link one national park to another (for example, Exmoor to Dartmoor) and to lead from important centres of population to a national park in reasonable proximity (Plymouth to Dartmoor was given as an example).

### (c) Subcommittees

The Special Committee divided itself into two subcommittees. One examined access matters and Stephenson was on this. Ritchie was on

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. paras 27-28.

<sup>2</sup> see above Section 2(b)(ii).

the other, the Footpaths Subcommittee, along with Merthyr, Elmhirst and Wheatley, but in fact Stephenson was influential on this also, providing it with memoranda, for example.

By the end of September 1946 the Footpath Subcommittee had prepared a report outlining its interim proposals.<sup>1</sup> "The need for a footpath record covering the whole country is paramount," it began, reflecting Ritchie's chief interest. It then went on to stress the maintenance and signposting of paths but asserted that:

"in general, no grants should be payable to local authorities in respect of the maintenance or signposting of footpaths or bridleways. We consider, however, that cases (for example, the Pennine Way and other long-distance paths) may arise in which the National Park Commission would wish to consider the desirability of making grants."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, it suggested that the Commission should "plan and create" long-distance paths.

Dower responded to this report by arguing that the Committee must be more specific about the funding of long-distance routes. "Either the National Park Commission (preferably) or the MTCP should be legally empowered to make such grants at its discretion."<sup>3</sup> A later synopsis of the Subcommittee's findings was accordingly more emphatic, although it showed that ideas about long-distance paths had not yet crystallised:

"(1) We strongly support the idea of long-distance and coastal paths. We consider that Planning Authorities should get together and execute these. We recommend that Planning Authorities should be required to consult with the National Park Authority in the planning of such paths.

(2) We recommend that the National Park Authority should have power to make grants in the respect of the provision of long-distance and coastal paths."<sup>4</sup>

Long-distance routes were loosely defined as "Footpaths serving non-local needs" and a further recommendation was that the Minister should be given the power to require local planning authorities to consult

<sup>1</sup> HLG 71/1707 op.cit. FAC 12 dated 27th September 1946.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. para 49.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. FAC 14 'Review of FAC 12 by John Dower',.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. FAC 31.



the National Park Authority or to produce schemes himself, if necessary.

The framework for the development of long-distance footpaths was slowly being developed although there was still no consistent and clear policy. It is possible to surmise once again that, had Dower been able to make a greater contribution, there might well have been a more thorough and systematic appraisal of the concept and the formation of policy recommendations.

(d) The Report on Footpaths and Access to the Countryside

The Special Committee's Report was eventually published in September 1947<sup>1</sup>, the result of forty meetings of the full committee and 26 of the subcommittees. It offered a comprehensive range of recommendations to untangle the intricacies of the law on rights of way and to provide for increased public access to the countryside. It also proposed the publication of a Country Code.

Recommendations for rights of way in general were important for the development of future long-distance paths and these included a compulsory nationwide survey of existing rights of way, the imposition on highway authorities of the duty to maintain and signpost these and new procedures for creating rights of way. This last item included the proposal that, although in general local planning authorities should be responsible for footpaths in their areas, county councils should initiate proposals for new rights of way. In addition, the county councils should have powers for the compulsory purchase of land or right of passage if agreement with a landowner could not be reached for a right of way to be dedicated. Disputed cases would be heard at Quarter Sessions, and the Minister would be given powers of default.

A chapter was devoted specifically to 'Long-Distance Rights of Way'<sup>2</sup>, although in fact the subject matter of the chapter is "rights

<sup>1</sup> Footpaths and Access to the Countryside - Report of the Special Committee (England and Wales) (Hobhouse Special Committee Report) Cmd 7207, 1947.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. Chapter VIII.



of way which are of more particular importance to ramblers and for the recreation use of the countryside." <sup>1</sup> The Committee recognised and was "strongly in favour" of three sorts of such routes:

- (i) a variety of footpaths in national parks and conservation areas, which included short paths, and had been described in the main Hobhouse Report;
- (ii) longer routes within and between these areas, avoiding roads as far as possible; and
- (iii) routes like the Pennine Way and the coastguard path as recommended by the Scott Report.

A distinction was hinted at later in the chapter between "long-distance or coastal footpaths" and "more locally situated" paths, but no attempt was made to define "long-distance" and it seems that the recommendations put forward were intended to cover all these three types of path.

However, it is implicit that the main attention was on the longest routes and further evidence of the type of route envisaged is found in a paragraph <sup>2</sup> which noted that maintenance costs for long-distance paths should be low because they would be primarily in unenclosed land "where there is an absence of stiles, gates and fences". Moreover, "Some of the principal long-distance footpaths which might be created or completed as long-distance rights of way" were outlined in an appendix to the Report and none of the six listed was shorter than seventy miles (112 km).

The list of suggested routes resulted from a memorandum by <sup>3</sup> Stephenson which was itself based on the submission of the Ramblers Association. However, Stephenson omitted the Roman Wall from the latter, which is interesting because this was one of the routes listed in the full Hobhouse Report. It is perhaps significant that the

<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 125.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. para 133.

<sup>3</sup> HLG 71/1707 op.cit. FAC 34 'Notes on long-distance footpaths' dated 29th January 1947.

original list, submitted by Stephenson to the Southern Area of the Ramblers Association in 1941 also omitted the Roman Wall, which coincides with the Pennine Way for about eleven miles (18 Km). In the memorandum Stephenson estimated the mileage of new rights of way which would be needed to complete the routes so that the cost of the proposals could be analysed. This analysis seems never to have been done.

The sixth route listed in the Report (along with the Pennine Way, Chilterns to Devon Coast, Pilgrims Way, South Downs to Salisbury Plain and Offa's Dyke) was the Thames Towpath and it was noted that the Thames Conservancy Board and the local authorities were examining the idea. The submission of the Ramblers Association had recommended the creation of paths along major rivers and, as well as listing the Thames Towpath, the Report also encouraged the development of paths along river and canal towpaths in general<sup>1</sup>. In addition it discussed ferries which were seen as often being "an essential communicating link in through routes", recommending that they be a responsibility of the highway authority.

The Report also recommended that the coastguards' path be developed with those sections in the national parks and conservation areas being opened first. An estimate of the new rights of way which would be required<sup>2</sup> had been made by the Ministry Map Office.

Having discussed the sorts of paths in question and indicated the emphasis to be on the "principal long-distance footpaths" the Committee made recommendations relating to what was recognised as the special nature of these routes. The Report urged that the local planning authorities "take into consideration the legitimate desires of the long-distance pedestrian"<sup>3</sup> although it recommended that the procedures

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1 Cmd 7207 op.cit. paras 134-6.

2 ibid. Appendix C, p53, based on FAC 35 (HLG 71/1707 op.cit.), dated 30th January 1947.

3 ibid. (Cmd 7207) para 129.

for the creation and maintenance of long-distance footpaths should be  
the same as for other rights of way.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the national element in the demand for long-distance routes it was recommended that the National Park Commission should have the responsibility for planning routes which were either in national park or conservation areas or covered more than one planning authority.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it was recommended that the Commission should be able to grant-aid the local planning authorities for the creation of the routes, although not for maintenance which was not seen as being a heavy burden.<sup>3</sup>

#### (e) Reactions to the Report

The Report concluded:

"If our proposals are accepted, and pass into law, they will confer upon the public a precious gift of greater rights and privileges. They will protect and preserve, more simply and yet more adequately than in the past, the footpaths engraved on the face of the land by the footsteps of our ancestors. They will provide long-distance footpaths which may be followed for many miles away from the din and danger of busy motor roads. In the wilder parts of the country our recommendations will provide for the greatest freedom of rambling access consistent with other claims on the land. They will enable active people of all ages to wander harmlessly over moor and mountains, over heath and down, and along cliffs and shores, and to discover for themselves the wild and lonely places, and the solace and inspiration they can give to men who have been 'long in city pent'. Thus we believe an effective contribution will be made to the health and well-being of the nation, and an important step taken towards establishing the principle that the heritage of our beautiful countryside should be held in trust for the benefit of the people."<sup>4</sup>

This was the spirit in which the Report was accepted by the amenity groups and by the Press. The Times called it a "Country Passport",<sup>5</sup> while the Manchester Guardian, in its leading editorial, commented:

"The document is hardly less important than the Report of the National Parks Committee."<sup>6</sup> In fact, the same paper had four different items

<sup>1</sup> ibid. para 133.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. para 130.      <sup>3</sup> ibid. paras 131 & 133.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. page 44.

<sup>5</sup> The Times 24th September 1947, p4a.

<sup>6</sup> Manchester Guardian 24th September 1947, p4a.



on the Report including a map showing the proposed long-distance footpaths.<sup>1</sup> The Daily Herald called the Report a "Rambler's Charter", thoroughly welcoming its recommendations and singling out the "much-needed Pennine Way".<sup>2</sup> However, it prophetically pointed to the lack of both finance and trained man-power in the local authorities as being problems for the future.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that it had been wartime, there had been considerable progress in developing ideas and support for countryside amenity and access matters. The Scott Committee's deliberations on Rural Land Use gave a great and unexpected boost to the campaigners. The Committee attracted submissions from various amenity and user groups, and in its Report the chapter on 'Preservation of the Countryside' included recommendations for the development of 'hikers highways', such as the Pennine Way, and the re-establishment of the Coastguard Paths for recreational use.

The well-publicised recommendations led to further developments within the Government, in which the idea of long-distance footpaths came out strongly. The strength of the amenity campaign was still considerable, and was boosted by the Scott recommendations. It was clear to the Government, even before the Scott Report, that something would have to be done on the subject of national parks and the countryside. John Dower was instructed to compile a report on national parks, and although his recommendations caused problems within the Ministry, it did publish the Report in 1945. The Report became the foundation for the national parks system in England and Wales, and, inter alia, supported the Scott recommendation for long-distance paths.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p4c.

<sup>2</sup> Daily Herald 24th September 1947, p2c.

As a direct outcome of Dower's deliberations the Hobhouse Committee was appointed in 1945 to examine the subject and because of the importance of footpaths in the development of the countryside, a Special Committee was appointed in 1946, based on the Hobhouse Committee, to examine footpaths and access to the countryside. The main Committee and the Special Committee attracted similar submissions to those given to the Scott Committee, and when the Hobhouse Special Committee reported in 1947, the idea of long-distance footpaths as a major provision in the countryside was established.

Specific long-distance routes were listed, based on the report by Tom Stephenson to the Southern Federation of the Ramblers Association in 1941, and submitted subsequently by the Ramblers Association to the Scott and Hobhouse Committees. It was recommended that routes be the responsibility of the proposed National Parks Committee, and the routes listed in the Hobhouse Special Report were the Pennine Way, a Chiltern to Devon route (including the Ridgeway), the Pilgrims Way, a South Downs route (extending to the Salisbury Plain), a route along Offa's Dyke and the Thames Towpath, plus the coastguards' path.

In addition, through the period Tom Stephenson, who had become so closely associated with the idea of long-distance paths, had established a very strong position for himself, not only as the representative of various amenity groups, such as the Pennine Way Association and the Ramblers Association, but also as a journalist, Press Secretary of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and associate of Lewis Silkin, who after Labour's victory in 1945 became the Minister of Town and Country Planning. Stephenson was a member of the Hobhouse Special Committee. Similarly, the Ramblers Association itself had established a dominant position and this strength was to be

critical over the latter years of the 1940s and the early years of the 1950s.

However, the immediate outlook was not as promising as it should have been, for in introducing the Report of the Hobhouse Special Committee to Parliament the Under Secretary to the Ministry, E.S.Hill, held out no hope for early legislation. The Report was a great boost to those campaigning for footpaths and access to the countryside, but it was clear that their battles had not yet been won. There was to be a period of continuing and growing frustration, and this and the unrelenting pressures from the campaigners and the eventual progress to legislation are the topics of the next chapter.

With the recommendations of the Hobhouse Special Committee, realistic proposals for the reform of footpath legislation had emerged, and a concrete scheme for the planning, development and financing of long-distance paths had now been achieved. The idea had developed through the 1940s and had found widespread acceptance as an integral part of the system of outdoor recreation the country required. The idea was to continue developing and consolidating, and the next step would be its incorporation into legislation, the subject of Chapter Five.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### LEGISLATION

#### 1. Introduction

Fears that the two Hobhouse Reports would be effectively ignored by the Government in the same way that the Addison Report had been were to prove ill-founded, for by the end of the decade the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was to be passed, incorporating a majority of the recommendations of the Reports. The development of the Bill and its progress through Parliament, together with the significance of the Act in the history of long-distance footpaths, are examined in the second half of this chapter.

However, before the Government was seen to be acting there was to be a period of over a year of frustration for the amenity campaigners. In 1947 the two Hobhouse Reports had given unequivocal support for the concepts of national parks in England and Wales and for increased public access, including long-distance paths. The Reports had proposed realistic schemes for implementing their proposals, and they had been well-received and well-publicised. The prevalent feeling seemed to be that national parks and greater opportunities for recreation in the countryside were desirable and should be created; and opposition to the general concepts had virtually disappeared. Moreover, throughout the 1940s various Ministers had pledged themselves as in favour of the provisions and the Ramblers Association was even able to claim to have received a promise from the Minister of Town and Country Planning that legislation would be introduced within the lifetime of the current Parliament. Yet, as 1947 and the months of 1948 passed, there was little sign of activity by the Government and the amenity campaigners were forced to continue their lobby and to

publicise their cause. Aspects of this continuing campaign and, in particular, the role of long-distance footpaths in it are examined in the first half of this chapter.

## 2. PUBLICITY-AND-PRESSURE

### (a) The Standing Committee on National Parks

In the same month that the Special Committee on Footpaths and Access to the Countryside reported (September 1947), the Standing Committee on National Parks submitted a fourteen-page memorandum to Lewis Silkin and followed this in December by a meeting with the Minister. The Chairman of the Standing Committee, Sir Norman Birkett, was particularly influential and, as he was a friend of Silkin's, he was able to stress the disappointment the amenity campaigners felt at the Government's apparent lack of interest.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, there was a fundamental difference of opinion between the amenity lobby and the Government over the machinery that should be used for the establishment and administration of national parks, and in particular over a National Parks Commission. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 had cast a different light on the situation for the Minister and his civil servants. It had created what were claimed to be effective planning units which had been given powers sufficient to protect national park areas. Indeed, there is evidence that Silkin and the staff of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning felt enough had been done. However, because of public<sup>2</sup> expectations they were prepared to consider a Commission although they maintained that such a Commission could have only an advisory role and must fit into the framework of the new planning legislation. The amenity lobby opposed this and pressed for a strong executive commission and a large degree of national control of the national parks.

<sup>1</sup> See Cherry op.cit. pp90-93.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p84.

This latter attitude was reflected in a speech by Lord Merthyr (Vice-President of the Commons Society and Chairman of the National Trust)<sup>1</sup> during an adjournment debate in the House of Lords in which he expressed concern that the Government might be tempted to resolve the issue by tagging a provision for a weak National Parks Commission onto a Bill for footpaths and access.

This debate, calling for the implementation of the Hobhouse recommendations, took place in April 1948. Although it contributed little to the thinking on amenity issues, it did put pressure on the Government and provided publicity for the amenity cause. Similarly, while there was no compromise over the major difference of opinion, the pressure from the Standing Committee and the publicity received by the amenity campaign during public discussions of the issue were important.

(b) Reports in the Times

Further publicity came from the media, including the Times, which reported in February and again in May 1948 on the "widespread disappointment at government inaction."<sup>2</sup> The Times was also able to report on and publicise two items of news which boosted the morale of those campaigning for the amenity interest.

(i) The Gathering Grounds Subcommittee<sup>3</sup>

The first was in July 1948 on the report of the Gathering Grounds Subcommittee of the Central Advisory Water Committee (appointed by the Minister of Health under Section 2 of the Water Act, 1945).

The Subcommittee's terms of reference were:

"To investigate the question whether the public should be allowed access to gathering grounds owned or controlled by water undertakers and the extent to which it is desirable that afforestation and agriculture be permitted in gathering grounds."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HL Reports 1947-48 vol 154 cols 1251-1302, 8th April 1948.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 15th February 1948 p5c; 10th May 1948 p5c.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 8th July 1948 p3b.

<sup>4</sup> Gathering Grounds - Public Access to Gathering Grounds, Afforestation and Agriculture on Gathering Grounds 8th July 1948.



According to Tom Stephenson, a number of the leaders of the Ramblers Association had urged the setting-up of an official committee to investigate the problem, because the attitude of water authorities was seen to be a major stumbling-block in the campaign for increased public access to uncultivated uplands. On the other hand, others, John Dower in particular, had been more cautious, feeling that such a committee would be overloaded with water engineers and that a report might in fact lead to greater restrictions. In the event, the only member of the Subcommittee associated with the amenity interest was L.K.Elmhirst, the Vice-Chairman of the Hobhouse Special Committee, who was co-opted onto the Subcommittee at its appointment in July 1946. The Subcommittee did take written evidence from a number of amenity groups and oral evidence was presented by a block of amenity bodies which included the Commons Society (represented by H.H.Symonds and Tom Stephenson). Further evidence was presented by the Ramblers Association.

In fact, the Subcommittee took a wide and objective view of its remit, a characteristic of this period, and its recommendation was that: "Subject to such reasonable safeguards, we consider that gathering grounds should be so managed as to make a contribution to the general welfare by providing facilities for healthy recreation and the production of food and timber."<sup>2</sup>

The Subcommittee recognised that the "improved means of transport and a growing desire for open-air recreation have led increasing number of townsmen to invade the hills in search of health and pleasure"<sup>3</sup>, and stated emphatically that:

"Subject to such limitations as may be necessary for the discouragement of large crowds, we can see no justification, on grounds of water purity, for prohibiting access by walkers, cyclists or motorists to the remainder of the gathering grounds."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview, May 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Gathering Grounds op.cit. p20.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. p7.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. p21.

although it recommended that access to the reservoirs themselves be restricted.

Such a vindication of the amenity lobby's case was seen as being of prime importance, especially coming from an official body appointed by the Minister of Health. Grouse made a convenient focus for the campaigners but it had long been realised that the use of the uplands for water collection was potentially more restricting, as Dower's Report had emphasised. The Gathering Grounds Report was also of particular importance for long-distance paths, and especially the Pennine Way, the southern part of which would run through the middle of several large catchments.

(ii) Silkin's Continuing Support

The second item on which the Times reported was in the following September (1948) when Evelyn Sharp, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning (and one of the few civil servants in the Ministry to back the Minister in his interest in amenity matters), reasserted to the new National Association of Parish Councils Silkin's continued interest in the preservation of the countryside and in the development of opportunities for recreation. In particular: "He has been greatly interested in the Hobhouse proposals for establishing long-distance rights of way around the coast and across England."<sup>1</sup>

(c) General Publicity for the Pennine Way

One of the more specific of the demands of the amenity lobby was the creation of long-distance footpaths and this topic continued to receive much attention from the media and elsewhere. The Pennine Way, in particular, had caught the public imagination.

As far back as the 1945-46 Parliamentary session a question had been asked concerning the opening of new footpaths "as the Pennine

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<sup>1</sup> The Times 29th September 1948, p2e.

1  
Way" , while a few months later, in November 1946, the Minister had  
2  
been asked when the Pennine Way would be open. The answer given to  
both these questions had been that the Hobhouse Special Committee was  
examining the question, but it is clear that there was some support  
for such schemes among members of Parliament.

In May the following year a lengthy article on the Pennine Way  
3  
appeared in the Times. This gave a summary of the development of the  
idea and a description of the route, asserting:

"The provision of a Pennine Way along the lines planned would be  
an asset in the balance sheet of scenic charm, a worthy project to  
entice the tramper from abroad to sample a part of England which,  
less than any other, will feel the changes made by the passage of  
time."4

The difficulties of the southern section, from Craven south to Edale,  
were then examined. The correspondent maintained that "The line of  
the Pennine Way is obvious", and that, although there were some tracks  
over the southern moors, "these circumvent the highest points and are  
hardly in keeping with a walkers' way visualised to take in the very  
cream of the Pennine scenery."

In fact, the article reported that the Minister of Town and Country  
Planning had approved the route of the Pennine Way, and that:

"Few announcements of recent years have given greater pleasure to  
the northern rambler - accustomed as he has been about arguments  
about the contraversial issues of access to the mountains and the  
maintenance of rights of way."5

In September 1947, just before the publication of the Hobhouse Special  
6  
Report, the Times featured the Pennine Way again (with a photograph  
of Malham Cove). The report stated that: "Ramblers are heartened by  
the announcement of the Minister's approval of the proposed Pennine  
Way", although there is no evidence that Silkin had done more than  
indicate his general support for the idea - and certainly at that time  
he had no powers to create rights of way to complete the route (as the  
two articles had seemed to suggest.) Nonetheless, this publicity for

1 HC Reports 1945-46 vol 425 col 1022, 16th July 1946.

2 HC Reports 1945-46 vol 430 col 277, 26th November 1946.

3 The Times 28th May 1947 p2b - 'Peak to Cheviot - New 250 mile way  
over Pennine Crests'. 4 ibid. 5 ibid.

6 The Times 12th September 1947 p10.



the Pennine Way was a boost for its supporters.

(d) The Open Air Movement

The examples of pressure and publicity for the amenity cause from the Standing Committee, from within both Houses of Parliament, and from the Times are indicative of interest within what might be termed 'the establishment'. Complementing this was pressure from the growing body of users of the countryside.

The use of the countryside for recreation in the years following the Second World War rapidly regained, and in many cases surpassed, the pre-war levels. At the guest houses of the Holiday Fellowship, for example, the number of 'guest weeks', which had stood at 45,169 in 1938, and dropped to 14,466 in 1943, recovered to reach 48,203 by 1948<sup>1</sup>, while membership of the YHA doubled from 83,000 in 1939 to 166,000 in 1946.<sup>2</sup> Ramblers' excursions and local clubs regained their popularity and more literature was produced for the massive band of countryside users.

(1) The Countrygoer

One example of such literature is the important series of outdoor publications<sup>3</sup> entitled The Countrygoer : A Book for the Townsman. This was established in 1944 explicitly to educate the public in the issues of countryside conservation and recreation and "to press and prepare for National Parks". The first issue sold some 12,500 copies, and a number of later editions sold 17,500. Three or four editions a year appeared throughout the 1940s, each with a different theme and with contributors such as Professor Joad and Francis Ritchie (who were both on the editorial board), G.M.Trevelyan, Dudley Stamp and the Manchester Guardian's Patrick Monkhouse. Developments in the amenity campaign were reviewed and the findings of the official reports summarised. The books also put forward policies for discussion. For

<sup>1</sup> The Countrygoer vol 18, 1949, p31.

<sup>2</sup> HLG 71/1707 Evidence FAC 36 op.cit.

<sup>3</sup> Countrygoer Books, London. The editor was Cyril Moore.

example, in the fourth edition, entitled Countrygoing a national leisure policy was advocated, the main post-war problem being seen as one of finding "lovely places" for all those who desired to visit them.

The same edition had articles on the proposal to develop the coastguard path and on the Pennine Way.<sup>1</sup> The main emphasis on the latter was the wilderness and solitude aspects of the Way, "offering during the course of this roofland excursion, some of the noblest expanses, the most spacious prospects, and, beyond question, the most genuine wilderness to be discovered in these islands." On the Pennine Way, the writer asserted:

"There is always air stirring and that is an air of exquisite delicacy, carrying not only the scent of the hills, but the music of beck and curlew, and air that recreates in the true sense. It makes you feel that you have really been refashioned with a new body and skin; even, if you are jaded, with a new wind.... You have the sense of being on top of things, over the hills, not under them, and very, very far away."<sup>2</sup>

#### (11) Mountain Trail

This aspect of wilderness recurred in the first book published on the Pennine Way : Mountain Trail - The Pennine Way from Peak to Cheviot by John Wood<sup>3</sup> which appeared in 1947. "Our way will never be over-thronged with pilgrims, for this call to high endeavour will not appeal to the mass nor could we wish it to."

The book, dedicated to the officers of the Pennine Way Association (PWA) gave a lively description of the scenery and history of the places on or near the line of the route as traced by Wood and sketch maps of the route were featured as end covers. North of Malham, Wood's route ran fairly closely to that proposed by the Association, including the final leg which was to run from Bellingham north through Rochester, over the Cheviot and to Wooler. South of Malham, however, there were major differences, with Wood deviating from the PWA's route

<sup>1</sup> The Countrygoer vol 4, 1945: 'The Pennine Way' by Ivor Brown, pp8-14.  
'The Coastguard Path' by Arthur Gardener, ppl7-21.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p8.

<sup>3</sup> Allen & Unwin, July 1947, pp240.

to take in Howarth, Ilkley and Skipton. He also continued his route south of Edale to Ashbourne.

The book contained no discussion of the reasons for the choice of route although some hint is given in the introduction:

"A pilgrimage is proclaimed! Let us resolve on tramping to Scotland by high ways that avoid highways, keeping as much as we can over the 1000 foot contour, and climbing above 2000 feet whenever possible."<sup>1</sup>

The very fact that a national publishing house had published a book devoted to the Pennine Way indicates how popular the idea had become by the late 1940s.

### (iii) The Countryside and How to Enjoy It

An example of a fairly expensive book for the countrygoer was the large, glossy hardback The Countryside and How to Enjoy It<sup>2</sup>, which was published in 1948. This book covered a wide spectrum of countryside matters and was concerned more with the interpretation than with the politics of the countryside. However, it did have a chapter on 'The Footpath Way' which reviewed the law on footpaths and the current situation in the countryside.

In a section on 'National Footpaths' the writer maintained that "easily the first is the Pennine Way, because it is the loneliest, highest, wildest and longest of all tracks south of Scotland." The wilderness aspect recurred:

"If you want to get away from your fellow man, to be alone with the clouds, the upland fells, and God, you cannot do better than to take the Pennine Way to Scotland."<sup>3</sup>

Other gentler routes were outlined, including the 52 mile (84 km) 'Downs Walk' between Eastbourne and Petersfield, the Ridgeway and the Roman Wall.

### (iv) Out of Doors

As a last example, another journal of great importance in the second half of the 1940s was Out of Doors - The Journal of the Open

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p12.

<sup>2</sup> Odhams Press, 1948, pp320. S.P.B.Mais was the main author.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. p64.



Air.<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that an article on the Pennine Way from the Autumn 1945 number of the journal was included as part of the introductory package for the Hobhouse Special Committee and that Tom Stephenson became its editor in mid-1946. During his period as editor (the last third of the 1940s) the journal reviewed countryside issues and developments and became an important organ in the campaign for legislation to allow greater access to the countryside. It had a marked political bias towards the left, a bias that came out clearly<sup>2</sup> in a review on John Wood's book on the Pennine Way. Stephenson used the opportunity to press for access to the Derbyshire moors, and likened grouse-shooting to Norman feudalism, being contrary to the concept of a freeborn Englishman and denying him his birthright of enjoying his native countryside.

Potential long distance footpaths received considerable publicity in Out of Doors. For example, following the Hobhouse Special Committee's Report, an editorial in the journal stated:

"Rightfully these recommendations[for long-distance paths] have received by far the most publicity and the appendix listing six walks, which as well as the Pennine Way includes Offa's Dyke, the Thames Towpath from Teddington to Cricklade and the great escarpment routes from the Chilterns and South Downs to Devonshire is the Crown of Part One of the Report."<sup>3</sup>

Issues such as waymarking were discussed, and it was later asserted that "It is axiomatic that no long-distance footpath should contain any stretch of road (and certainly not main road) which could possible<sup>4</sup> be avoided." This statement occurred in an article on the 'Thames Way' which was seen as being complementary in character to the Pennine Way.

Other schemes for long-distance footpaths reported in the journal indicated that the interest in creating routes had been taken up by groups other than the Pennine Way Association. For example, it was

<sup>1</sup> Open Air Publications, Manchester. This resumed publication in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Out of Doors vol 9, Autumn 1947, p39.

<sup>3</sup> Out of Doors Winter 1947, p43.

<sup>4</sup> Out of Doors July/August 1948, p249.

reported that the Northern Federation of the Ramblers Association had submitted a report to the planning consultants responsible for the Outline Plan for the North East Development Area, including plans for long-distance paths, among them a riverside route linking the coast with the Pennine Way together with radial routes from the urban areas.<sup>1</sup> In May 1948 the members of the Cambridge YHA Group were reported to be surveying a long-distance route following a Roman Road across Gog Magog and through Cambridge and beyond, while later the idea of the Pilgrims Way was reported to have been taken up by the County Planning Officer of Kent in his preliminary outline plan for the county. He recommended the creation of a 'Kent Path' and had surveyed the route across his county. He hoped that Surrey and Hampshire would follow suit so that the Pilgrims Way would become the first long-distance route to be established.<sup>2</sup>

(v) Conclusion

The various journals and year books of the user groups also reflected the developments in thinking on issues involved in the campaign, and together with publications like the wide variety of examples cited ensured that the large and growing body of countryside users and other members of the public interested in countryside matters were kept informed and were able to lend powerful support to the leaders of the amenity lobby.

(e) The Pennine Way Hike by Members of Parliament

In 1937 the amenity campaigners had been advised, as a result of their deputation to the Minister of Health, to attempt to change public opinion to accept the idea of national parks and related issues; eleven years later the campaigners felt that public opinion had by then shifted sufficiently in favour of such measures.

1 Out of Doors Winter 1947 op.cit, p47.

2 Out of Doors July/August 1949, p134.

Throughout the 1940s there is clear evidence of increasing acceptance of the concepts of national parks and free public access to the countryside, including a considerable growth in 'grass roots' support for these matters from an increasing number of well-informed users of the countryside. Pressure had been sustained from the publication of the Hobhouse Reports and publicity and support had come from a wide variety of sources.

Nonetheless, an editorial in the Countrygoer in 1946 had noted that interest among the general public was growing but slowly, with only the News Chronicle<sup>1</sup> of the popular press giving much coverage to the campaign. One event was to ensure full publicity for the campaign, especially from the popular press. This was the hike along the northern part of the Pennine Way by a group of prominent Labour politicians arranged and led by Tom Stephenson.

Arthur Blenkinsop, on his election in 1945 as Member of Parliament for Darlington, had asked Tom Stephenson to take him along part of the Pennine Way and from this Stephenson got the idea of the May 1948<sup>2</sup> hike. The walk was described by Barbara Castle MP, one of the group, in the Spectator. Most prominent in the group was Hugh Dalton, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, recently elected President of the Ramblers Association, and at the time Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He was a figure very much in the public eye. Geoffrey de Freitas, Under-Secretary of State for Air, was the other Minister in the group, although he was on the hike as President of the Nottingham branch of the Ramblers Association. In addition, there was Julian Snow, MP, and four members from northern England - George Chetwynd (Dalton's Parliamentary Private Secretary), Fred Willey (who later became Minister of Natural Resources), Arthur Blenkinsop himself, and Barbara Castle.

<sup>1</sup> The Countrygoer vol 6 ('National Parks'), 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.



A large party of journalists followed the group along part of its hike north from Teesdale to the Roman Wall. The story was featured on the front pages of a number of the popular daily papers (including the Daily Herald and the Daily Mirror) as well as several local papers. The event was also reported in the Manchester Guardian and even in the Times; in the latter the reason for the "MP's Walking Tour" was given as providing them with the background for legislation on national parks.<sup>1</sup>

This very important publicity for the campaign was followed up by the Ramblers Association persuading its members to write to their MPs pressing for legislation and by a series of major public meetings. At one of these at Kingsway Hall in London the speakers included the Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, Viscount Samuel, Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Tom Stephenson, while a meeting in Birmingham at the beginning of 1949 attracted an audience of some 1500 and was addressed by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Tom Stephenson (who, by the end of 1948 had been appointed Honorary Secretary of the Ramblers Association), Professor Joad, Francis Ritchie and the Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin.<sup>2</sup>

The hike along the Pennine Way and its aftermath were seen by some of the campaigners as having provided the final push that persuaded the Government to act when it did.<sup>3</sup> However, the Government had not been as inactive as had seemed to many of the amenity campaigners and the central figure in the development of ideas on national parks and increased public access to the countryside within the Government was Lewis Silkin.

### 3. ACTIVITY WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT

Silkin had pressed for amenity legislation from his appointment as Minister of Town and Country Planning in 1945. In a memorandum to the

<sup>1</sup> The Times 25th May 1948, p5f.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.

Lord President's Committee in August 1945 he stated that he was strongly in favour of national parks with appropriate increased access and low-cost accommodation, and that this "should be given a relatively high place in our programme"<sup>1</sup>. Silkin's positive attitude to the delegation from the Ramblers Association in December the same year has already been noted, as had his stated intention at the beginning of 1946 to include amenity legislation in the 1947-48 session of Parliament, which had prompted John Dower to press for the establishment of what was to become the Hobhouse Special Committee.

Nonetheless, it is possible to trace something of a decline in Silkin's enthusiasm for national park legislation in 1947, as the implications of the Hobhouse proposals were examined, chiefly because the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 had significantly changed the situation. The main stumbling blocks proved to be the relationship of the proposed National Parks Commission to the Ministry and to the counties and the financial implications of the development of national parks.<sup>2</sup>

However, in 1948 Silkin decided to press for legislation which, contrary to the wishes of several officials in the Ministry, would include provision for a National Parks Commission, albeit an emasculated version of that proposed by Hobhouse and demanded by the amenity campaigners. Silkin obviously had no great personal desire to see a Commission, but he recognised that an independent body to administer Exchequer grants would have merit - and that the public expectation was for a Commission.

In April 1948 Silkin presented a paper to the Lord President's Committee entitled 'National Parks, Footpaths and Access to Uncultivated land, and Wildlife Conservation'<sup>3</sup> in which the importance of the public expectation was clearly recognised:

<sup>1</sup> LP(45)136 dated 14th August 1945 (PRO); see also Cherry op.cit.p50.

<sup>2</sup> See Cherry op.cit.pp81-95.

<sup>3</sup> CAB 132/10 - LP(48)33 dated 17th April 1948 (PRO).

"The publication of the Report on National Parks and its associated reports... has undoubtedly aroused a general expectation among the open-air interests and the amenity societies that the machinery will be created to implement the proposals made for the establishment and running of national parks in this country. The movement in favour of national parks is part of the general trend of demand for access to the open country by urban dwellers, and the recent enthusiasm inspired by the Hobhouse Reports and the considerable publicity accorded to these are only the culmination of some twenty years of advocacy and propaganda for the national parks idea. Moreover there have in recent years been several public statements by Ministers expressing favour towards the principles underlying the demand for national parks. I have accordingly given close and sympathetic consideration to the proposals made by the Hobhouse Committee and have held out the hope of legislation on the subject within the lifetime of the present Parliament.<sup>1</sup>"

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At the meeting of the Committee, Silkin was "most anxious" that a bill should be presented in the 1948-49 session, and asked for authorisation to prepare a bill. However, he recognised that much preparatory work was still needed and the Committee instructed him to undertake this work.

Accordingly, after carrying out consultations, Silkin presented a second memorandum to the Lord President's Committee in July 1948,<sup>3</sup> entitled 'National Parks, Footpaths and Access to Uncultivated Land'. This paper included a noticeable clarification of ideas and, for the first time, a clear indication of what form legislation would take.

Nonetheless, there was still flexibility and details had not been finalised. For example, pressure from the county councils had persuaded the Minister to propose that the registration of rights of way should be a power rather than a duty. The Hobhouse Special Committee had recommended the latter and, following further representations by the amenity lobby, it was eventually included in the Bill as a duty. On the other hand, many actual policies were now clear, for example, on access, where Silkin was not to follow the Hobhouse recommendation since he was:

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> CAB 132/9 - LP(48) 6th Meeting - 23rd April 1948.

<sup>3</sup> CAB 132/10- LP(48)54, dated 25th June 1948.



"not myself entirely convinced that any provision is needed to facilitate public access to uncultivated land in private ownership other than the provision I propose to make for creating new rights of way and for enabling areas in national parks to be acquired."<sup>1</sup>

However, Silkin continued that, because of public agitation, he could not ignore the issue, and thus he proposed that planning authorities should be empowered to declare access to specific areas and that compensation could be payable.

In his paper, Silkin proposed the establishment of a National Parks Commission, one of the duties of which was to be concerned with long-distance footpaths:

"I propose that the Commission should take the initiative in the creation and maintenance of particularly important rights of way, especially the long-distance rights of way. These may be in National Park areas or outside them. The local planning authority would [execute the plan], and the cost including the cost of providing stiles, gates, bridges, etc. as necessary would be borne by my Department, advised by the Commission. I would take powers to act in default of the local planning authority."<sup>2</sup>

This statement went further than the Hobhouse recommendations and it is clear that, in the balancing of the proposed measure to appease officials in the Ministry, the amenity lobby and the other interests, long-distance footpaths had done particularly well. It may be significant that drafting of this paper would have coincided with the MP's hike along the Pennine Way.

The Lord President's Committee discussed the paper and, although it did not commit itself to accepting legislation, it authorised Silkin to prepare a bill. In fact, such had been Silkin's drive that the Future Legislation Committee had already provisionally accepted a bill for the next session and by September instructions had gone to the Parliamentary Counsel to prepare it. In October the King's Speech intimated<sup>3</sup> "Legislation will be introduced to establish national parks in England and Wales; to improve the law relating to footpaths and access to the countryside; and to ensure the conservation of

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> CAB 132/9 - LP(48) 11th Meeting, 2nd July 1948. (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 457 col 7.

wildlife," and by January 1949 the title of a draft bill had been agreed: "National Parks and Access to the Countryside."

#### 4. THE DRAFTING OF THE BILL

The period of discussion of the early drafts of the Bill seems to have been one of posturing between the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and the Treasury.<sup>1</sup> For example, whereas Silkin wanted a Commission to have freedom to recruit staff, the Treasury insisted that it be staffed by civil servants. The meeting of the Lord President's Committee in February 1949 decided in favour of the Treasury on this issue and similarly overruled the Minister's wish that all the members of the Commission should be eligible for payment. On the other hand, Hugh Dalton (unlike Silkin, a member of the Cabinet) submitted his own paper to this meeting and thus strengthened Silkin's stand on other issues.

Whereas the provision of long-distance footpaths was to be a relatively uncontroversial issue throughout the amenity campaign and during the passage of the Bill through Parliament, it was uncharacteristically to prove a source of contention in this period of bargaining between the Treasury and the Ministry. The disagreements arose from Silkin's proposal, set out in the paper submitted to the Lord President's Committee in July 1948, that long-distance routes should be funded by the Ministry. In fact, this had been the first time that 100% grant had been proposed, although some funding by central government had been suggested by the Hobhouse Committee and others. The draft Bill, then, held provision for the Minister to defray expenditure incurred by the planning authorities on the creation and maintenance of long-distance routes (the latter, defraying expenditure on maintenance, being contrary to the recommendations of

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<sup>1</sup> See Cherry op.cit. pp99-104.

the Hobhouse Committee). The Treasury first objected that the standard phrase "with the consent of the Treasury" had been omitted from the relevant clause and, after a concerted effort by Dame Evelyn Sharp to keep Treasury interference to a minimum, the Treasury had its way on this detail.<sup>1</sup>

That the Treasury agreed to the Ministry being empowered to defray the cost of long-distance routes was in itself surprising. According to Cherry, "the Chancellor's agreement to 100% grant on long-distance paths was on the understanding that there would be only two or three of them."<sup>2</sup> Given that the Hobhouse Special

Report listed six potential routes plus the coastal path this is surprising, and Cherry conceded that this interpretation probably came from a departmental paper rather than being attributable to any Ministerial statement.<sup>3</sup> It seems that, while the Ministry

was to give way to the Treasury over such things as grant-aiding a warden service and the cost of staff in national parks, it stuck to its proposals for long-distance paths. However, it stressed that this would involve relatively few schemes and the

Treasury let this pass. Probably a central reason for the importance attached to long-distance routes was that the facility represented one of the very few executive functions of the proposed

National Parks Commission and the Ministry was anxious that the Commission was not seen to be completely emasculated.

Long-distance footpaths thus benefitted from the period of bargaining between the Ministry and the Treasury:

"Given the economic difficulties of 1949 the Treasury were extremely cautious on any item of expenditure. It was obviously a difficult problem. On the one hand MTCP wanted every advantage to be conferred on the National Park authorities because Silkin feared that the rural counties would be reluctant to do anything unless they had financial carrots. On the other hand the Treasury were reluctant to dispense monies without the strongest possible case."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ibid. pp 103-4 (this brings out well the attitudes of the Treasury to this measure and the influence of the amenity lobby).

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p104.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, Gordon E.Cherry to present writer dated 13th July 1979.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.



Long-distance paths emerged from this debate in the unique position of having the biggest carrot possible - 100% funding for their creation and maintenance.

## 5. THE PASSAGE OF THE BILL THROUGH THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

### (a) The First and Second Readings

The Bill passed the Legislative Committee in March 1949 and received its first reading in the House of Commons on March 17th<sup>1</sup>.

Bill 96 was published the same day and four clauses dealt exclusively with long-distance routes:

Section 44 dealt with the planning of the routes by the National Parks Commission;

Section 45 dealt with the responsibilities of the Minister;

Section 46 covered the local authorities' responsibilities and the default powers of the Minister; and

Section 80 empowered the Minister to defray the cost of the creation and maintenance of a route.

In introducing the Second Reading of the Bill<sup>2</sup>, Lewis Silkin commended the various amenity groups, the Ramblers Association, the Youth Hostels Association, the Cyclists Touring Club, the Commons Society and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, and remarked that: "The results of their endeavours to interest and arouse public opinion have been slow but steady" Now, with 150,000 people registered as ramblers, walkers, cyclists and climbers:

"This is not just a Bill. It is a peoples' charter - a peoples' charter for open air - for the hikers and the ramblers, for everyone who loves to get out into the open air and enjoy the countryside."<sup>3</sup>

There was a general welcome for the Bill from both sides of the House of Commons and E.M.King, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, echoed the sentiments of a number of speakers in winding up the debate. He maintained that the Bill was:

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 462 col 2302, 17th March 1949.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 463 cols 1461-1568 and 1579-1667, 31st March and 1st April 1949.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. col 1462.

"a token tribute to the spirit of travel, adventure and exploration which we like to see and want to see abroad in the land. That is the challenge we seek to meet and that is the genesis of the demand for access to open country, long-distance footpaths and the like."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, King cited long-distance routes first in his summary of the positive provisions of the Bill, and it is significant that they received greater attention in this introductory debate than at any other stage in the passage of the Bill. It was to be mainly those parts of the Bill which differed from the Hobhouse recommendations, in particular the function and powers of the Commission, the administration of the parks themselves, and Part V, on access to open country (acknowledged by Silkin to be the most difficult and controversial part of the Bill), which were to generate most of the discussion during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. There was no criticism of the idea of long-distance footpaths and, although the wording of the sections dealing with them was changed considerably before the Act was passed, the uncontroversial nature of the subject led to relatively little deliberation about long-distance paths after the Second Reading.

In his introductory speech, Silkin said of the establishment of long-distance routes:

"This has been one of the grievances of the Ramblers Association and other associations. Examples I have in mind are the Pennine Way, Pilgrims Way and a number of coastal paths; and there has been some talk of a Thames-side path."<sup>2</sup>

For the opposition, W.S. Morrison stated that he was very much in favour of the provisions for footpaths, especially the powers to create new ones. "There is no better way of protecting farms from damage by ramblers than by the ample provisions of places where they may walk and do no damage."

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. col 1665.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. col 1478.

Other references to long-distance paths help to shed light on the perception and standing of the idea among MPs. Somerville Hastings, for example, particularly commended "the part of the Bill dealing with long-distance routes, those ancient trackways hallowed by history and tradition,"<sup>1</sup> the Ridgeway being his prime example. Long-distance paths featured again during a discussion on finances. There was criticism that there was insufficient support in the Bill for the poorer counties and trunk roads were given as an example of where a county got back a 100 percent grant. The Parliamentary Secretary replied that long-distance footpaths were comparable to trunk roads, but the MP for Merioneth, Emrys Roberts, commented: "So far as I can see the long-distance footpaths are not very common. The Minister mentioned two, one of which is the Pilgrim's Way. I do not know that there will be any in North Wales."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, Barbara Castle made a speech which was of particular significance to this examination of long-distance footpaths, for she thought that:

"some of the proposals go much further than we had a right to expect. I particularly welcome the very important powers of initiative given to the National Park Commission on the question of long-distance routes. We have in these powers the perfect machinery for the achievement of long-distance paths we have been hoping for."<sup>3</sup>

(b) The Committee Stage

Following the Second Reading of the Bill, it was passed to Standing Committee A, which considered it from the end of April to the beginning of June 1949.<sup>4</sup> This stage lasted some 32 hours and the reports totalled 200,000 words<sup>5</sup>, though clauses on long-distance routes, considered on May 19th, were very little changed at this stage, and then only in respect of Section 44(2). In S44(2)(a) "public path or road used as public path" was inserted instead of

<sup>1</sup> ibid.col 1646.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.col 1527.

<sup>3</sup> ibid.col 1510.

<sup>4</sup> HC Debates 1948-49 Standing Committee A, 28th-April- 1st June 1949.

<sup>5</sup> The Countrygoer vol 18, 1949, editorial.



"highway" to remove any liability for maintaining roads as well as footpaths.<sup>1</sup>

Two more items were discussed at this stage which gave clues as to how long-distance routes were perceived, both of them introduced by Keeling. On the first he felt sure that:

"I shall have the Committee with me when I say we do not want paths, especially long-distance paths, to be urbanised by unnecessary metal or concrete... I suggest that on these paths all that is necessary is a few simple footbridges, stiles, in enclosed country, signposts and occasional stones where ground is liable to flooding and where a bridge is not necessary."<sup>2</sup>

His attempt to have this point incorporated into the Bill was negatived because it was thought unnecessary to shackle the National Park Commission.

Secondly, Keeling wanted restrictions on the use of roads which in the Bill could apply to those in national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and along long-distance routes, to apply elsewhere. He gave as an example of his concern "one of the best green roads, the Berkshire Ridgeway, which may or may not become a long-distance footpath but which certainly is not likely to become one immediately after the passage of the Bill." He felt that, although the Ridgeway was technically a highway, motor cars should not be able to use it without restriction, otherwise "they would destroy the amenities of one of the best walking or riding routes in England."<sup>3</sup>

Keeling did not succeed in this (although later it was established<sup>4</sup> that existing legislation already covered this) and, in the ensuing discussion, Sutcliffe urged that powers to restrict traffic should not apply to trunk or classified roads, noting that the Hobhouse Special Committee's recommendations on the Pilgrims Way would possibly entail<sup>5</sup> major road closures .

<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee A op.cit. col 827.    <sup>2</sup> ibid. col 827.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. col 946.

<sup>4</sup> See R.N.Hutchins The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Butterworth & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1950, p198.

<sup>5</sup> Standing Committee A op.cit. col 950.

(c) Recommittal and the Third Reading

The Standing Committee's amendments were included in Bill 148<sup>1</sup> and were considered by the House in Committee on 19th June 1949<sup>2</sup>, following the passage of the Money Resolution on the same day. At this stage, amid very little discussion, there were three major changes in the sections dealing with long-distance routes.

In the Second Reading debate Somerville Hastings had raised the issue of the provision of accommodation and refreshments near long-distance routes<sup>3</sup>, primarily in the context of the Ridgeway. He also raised the issue on two occasions during the deliberations in the Standing Committee, asserting that the provision of accommodation (in hostels in particular), meals, refreshments and camp sites should be applicable to long-distance footpaths as it was to be in national parks.<sup>4</sup> He had been ruled out of order but at Recommittal the Government incorporated his points into a new clause<sup>5</sup>. Silkin noted:

"The Committee will appreciate that it is not much use providing long-distance routes of the character which has been referred to, running many miles, unless there is some provision for accommodation, meals and refreshment."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, during the Standing Committee stage, Keeling had tried to introduce a new clause to provide for ferries, following the recommendation of the Hobhouse Special Committee, and this point too was the subject of a new clause moved by the Government at Recommittal.<sup>7</sup>

The only comment concerning these came from C. Williams who said:

"I would point out that it will add considerably to the cost. We may have to provide a large number of ferries and a large amount of accommodation for meals and refreshment. It is rather amazing

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1 HC Bills 1948-49 Bill 148, 1st June 1949. Sections 44-46 of Bill 96 become respectively Sections 49-51; Section 80 becomes Section 88.

2 HC Reports 1948-49 vol 467.

3 HC Reports 1948-49 vol 463 col 1646.

4 Standing Committee A op.cit. cols 685 and 829.

5 Similar to Section 53 of the Act - See Appendix.

6 HC Reports 1948-49 vol 467 op.cit. col 1257.

7 Similar to Section 54 of the Act - See Appendix.

that, after all the warnings we have had in the last few days from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we should be calmly and easily accepting the enormous cost...."<sup>1</sup>

Consequential amendments altered Section 49 (of Bill 148) to allow the National Park Commission to plan for ferries and accommodation and altered Section 88 to allow the Minister to "defray or contribute towards" the cost of these additional items. It is significant that these were not automatically to be eligible for 100 percent grant, and presumably the amendments had been disallowed in the Standing Committee to facilitate a consultation between the Ministry and the Treasury. The Treasury must have been convinced that the extra expenditure that might be incurred would be relatively small but this time would not countenance automatic reimbursement of the cost.

A further Government amendment introduced another clause allowing<sup>2</sup> for variations in proposals for long-distance routes, which were to be dealt with in the same manner as the original proposal.

The third Reading took place two days later<sup>3</sup> with no discussion, and the Bill moved to the House of Lords.

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<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 467 op.cit. col 1186.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to Section 55 of the Act - See Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 467 col 1691, 21st July 1949.



## 6. THE PASSAGE OF THE BILL THROUGH THE HOUSE OF LORDS

### (a) First and Second readings

The Bill introduced into the House of Lords, Bill 163, received its<sup>1</sup> first Reading on 22 July 1949, and those parts relating to long-distance routes by now looked very different to those in the original Bill.

Section 51 of Bill 163 was Section 44 of the original Bill 96, with the minor amendments made in the Standing Committee and consequential amendments carried during the Recommittal in the House of Commons;

Section 52 was Section 45 of Bill 96, unaltered;

Section 53 was the new clause introduced at Recommittal dealing with the provision of ferries (Subsection 5 contained the default powers of the Minister relating to the provision of ferries);

Section 54 was also new, dealing with the provision of accommodation, meals and refreshments along long-distance routes;

Section 55 was Section 46 of Bill 96, verbatim;

Section 56 was the other clause introduced at Recommittal, concerning the variation of approved proposals; and

Section 97 was Section 80 of Bill 96 with a second paragraph added to cover accommodation and ferries.

Because of the summer recess the Second Reading in the House of<sup>2</sup> Lords did not take place until mid-October. As in the House of Commons there was a general welcome for the Bill during the debate on the Second Reading. In introducing the measure, Lord MacDonald of Gwaenysgor (the Paymaster General, who, with Lord Chorley, the Lord in Waiting, was in charge of the Bill in the Lords) claimed that:

"Even the most outspoken critics will agree that the Bill is a step in the right direction. It enables thousands to discover for the first time what peace and quiet and beauty of the countryside can mean to the human race. If it helps to create a healthy mental outlook and develop the steadiness and stability so greatly needed in the world today, the Bill will be justified."<sup>3</sup>

For the Opposition, Ear/ de la Warr commented in the same vein:

"When one thinks of that great body of 150,000 or 200,000 young ramblers throughout the country who today are finding immense

<sup>1</sup> HL Reports 1948-49 vol 164 col 387.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. cols 878-936 and 949-1010, 18th & 19th October 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the Times 19th October 1949, p6a.

enjoyment, and who in the future may get more, I think we must all be pleased."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the passage of the Bill through Parliament, the emphasis was on the increased opportunities for enjoyment of the countryside, rather than aspects of conservation, and this greatly strengthened the standing of those parts which would obviously increase these opportunities, of which the provisions for long-distance routes were a prime example. About long-distance routes, Lord MacDonald said:

"Probably your Lordships are fond of walking in the country, as I am. Sometimes these walks have been interrupted because we have not had a scheme for long-distance paths. The Bill provides, for example, for the linking up of the Pennine Way, which will be a godsend to some people, for long-distance paths around the coast, and for the completion of the Pilgrims Way."<sup>2</sup>

In the debate there were only two other references to long-distance routes. Earl Radnor advocated a complete revision of rights of way, with new ones being created around towns as well as long-distance routes<sup>3</sup>, while Viscount St. Davids urged that "if we are building continuous footpaths across areas, let us make sure that at regular intervals along these paths accommodation is available at prices which hikers are likely to be able to afford."<sup>4</sup>

#### (b) The Committee Stage

Several weeks passed before the Lords considered the Bill in Committee<sup>5</sup> and, as some three hundred amendments had been tabled, there was real concern whether all the stages could be covered before the end of Parliament. Long-distance routes were considered on November 10th, and the several changes that took place were mainly drafting amendments which had little effect on the content of the Bill, although they also shed some light on the perception of the idea of long-distance routes.

For example, in Section 51(2)(b) of Bill 163 "such" was added before "new paths" and "as may be required for enabling the public to

<sup>5</sup> HL Reports 1948-49 vol 165 cols 339-398, 477-630 & 666-706, 8th, 10th and 15th November 1949.

<sup>1</sup> HL Reports 1948-49 vol 164 op.cit. col 890.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. col 887.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. col 908.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. col 916.



journey along the route" replaced the existing wording following "path". This amendment was made because, as it had read, it appeared that long-distance routes would always have some part along roads, and that was not necessarily the case.<sup>1</sup>

The whole of Section 55 was omitted as a consequential amendment as long-distance routes were being added to Section 95 which dealt with the execution of proposals and covered the Minister's powers of default in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Section 53(5) was omitted as being redundant. Minor drafting amendments were made to Sections 51, 54 and 97.<sup>3</sup>

An amendment to Section 92 was passed allowing the National Parks Commission to apply to the Minister for an order restricting traffic on long-distance routes if a county council decided not to make an order, a power which was already to apply to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This subject of traffic restriction generated some discussion and Earl Howe introduced two clauses which would have resulted in road users having to be consulted before any restriction of road use could be implemented, by the publication of the route of a proposed long-distance path in the London Gazette prior to submission of the report to the Minister. Lord Howe withdrew the clauses following Lord Chorley's concern that at this stage "the whole problem should be kept as flexible as possible. If an advertisement of this kind is inserted [in the London Gazette] it tends immediately to make things definite and inelastic."<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, Earl Howe was not satisfied and raised the issue for a third time at the Report stage, when he sought to require the Minister to publish in the London Gazette a notice indicating where maps of proposed routes were available for public

<sup>1</sup> ibid. (vol 165), col 564.  
<sup>3</sup> ibid cols 564, 571 & 628.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. col 571.  
<sup>4</sup> ibid. col 569.



inspection. Lord Chorley reasserted that this procedure would be too rigid, but he did give assurance that motoring organisations would be consulted<sup>1</sup>. Previously there had been a statement by the Government spokesman that it would be highly unlikely that the measure would be used on a first-class road.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, during the Committee stage, Lord Amherst introduced an amendment to ensure that river boards and drainage authorities should be consulted, especially in connection with new bridges, prior to the Minister giving approval to a proposal for a long-distance route. However, the amendment was withdrawn after it was pointed out that the Thames Towpath was the most obvious example where this situation would arise, yet the Thames Conservancy had not requested such an amendment.<sup>3</sup>

Although it was to have little effect on road users or river interests, the Government's resistance to publishing the line of a proposed long-distance footpath and to specifying that consultations should take place (other than with the local planning authorities) before the submission of a report to the Minister is of considerable significance. The amount of consultation which should take place and the extent to which plans should be made public have been at the fore of the changes in procedure for creating long-distance routes for the past thirty years, and more guidance in the legislation may have made a difference to the success of some of the schemes.

### (c) The Final Stages of the Bill

The amendments passed in the Committee stage were reported on November 22nd,<sup>4</sup> and speeches by Lord Howe (mentioned above) and Lord Rochester, who attempted to remove the provision for the sale of

1 ibid. cols 868-872.

3 ibid. col 567.

2 ibid. col 623.

4 ibid. cols 813-894, 22nd November 1949.

intoxicating liquor from Section 54(2), related to long-distance paths. In fact, the final amendment to the clauses on long-distance routes also took place at this stage, with a second paragraph being added to Section 54(2) to allow accommodation, facilities and refreshments to be provided only if the existing facilities were inadequate or unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup> This was in response to a concern raised throughout the passage of the Bill (usually in the context of national parks) that state-subsidised facilities should not compete with private concerns. Youth hostels were frequently mentioned as illustrating the type of facility envisaged.

Viscount Addison moved the Third Reading on November 24th<sup>2</sup> and the measure was returned to the House of Commons as Bill 212. On December 9th the 140 amendments passed in the House of Lords were agreed by the Commons with no discussion,<sup>3</sup> although two consequential amendments<sup>4</sup> were added and returned to the House of Lords. The debate there took place on December 15th<sup>5</sup> as one of the very last acts of the 38th Session of the British Parliament which was prorogued the following day.

On that day, 16th December 1949, the Bill received the Royal Assent,<sup>6</sup> and the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act<sup>7</sup> became law.

## 7. THE ACT

### (a) Content

Parts I and II of the Act dealt with the establishment of a National Parks Commission and national parks (together with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Hobhouse's Conservation Areas). The Manchester Guardian had pointed out in editorials when the Bill was first published that Silkin's views on national parks obviously did not coincide with those of the amenity campaigners and that:

<sup>1</sup> ibid. col 872.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. cols 1002-6, 24th November 1949.

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1948-49 vol 470 cols 2291-3, 9th December 1949.

<sup>4</sup> HL Reports 1948-49 vol 165 col 1517, 13th December 1949.

<sup>5</sup> ibid. cols 1664-6, 15th December 1949.      <sup>6</sup> ibid. col 1668, 16th December 1949.

<sup>7</sup> 12, 13 & 14 Geo 6, Chapter 97.

"For the national park movement in England and Wales the Bill introduced by Mr Silkin yesterday is the disappointing but not disastrous outcome of twenty years campaigning".<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the Bill was to be strengthened during its passage through Parliament but the Act still fell short of what the lobbyists had hoped for. For example, the National Parks Commission was to be advisory, not executive, and only one third of the members of the park committees and boards were to be Ministerial appointees (that is, representing the national interest). Nonetheless, where a national park was in the jurisdiction of more than one county authority, a joint planning board was to be the normal administrative unit and, as there was to be a Commission and national parks, with Government funding, the campaigners recognised that this was a considerable achievement.

Part V of the Act, dealing with access to open country, again fell short of what the campaigners had hoped for, but it did represent progress and had, in fact, been strengthened during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. After pressure from both sides, the Government agreed to a survey of access requirements as a duty of the counties, which had to be completed before the end of 1951. (The landed interests had pressed for this because they felt that it would be unfair to create official access areas without a survey of the need for such a provision.) Access agreements and orders were to be made by the planning authority and compensation was to be payable to landowners. Byelaws could be made over the areas and, as a result, a warden service could operate in such areas. The 1939 Access to Mountains Act was repealed and the infamous trespass clause was not<sup>2</sup> re-enacted.

It was Part IV of the Act, dealing with rights of way, which the campaigners recognised as being the most satisfactory, for only one of

<sup>1</sup> Manchester Guardian 18th March 1949, p4a.

<sup>2</sup> Part III of the Act dealt with nature conservation and, although recognised as being a most satisfactory part of the Act, it was a completely separate matter.



their main demands, the compulsory signposting of rights of way, was resisted by the Government.

The Times had commented:

"On the whole...landowners are more willing than they were a generation ago to sanction the public use of footpaths across their property, and there has been a corresponding improvement in the general behaviour of the average user."<sup>1</sup>

Footpaths were regarded fairly favourably by the landowning interests during the passage of the Bill through Parliament, partly because they represented a way of controlling and limiting public access to their land. In addition the landowning interests and the representatives of local authorities were prepared to concede points relating to footpaths in exchange for concessions in other matters. Moreover, it was difficult to be 'against' footpaths, which were represented as being part of the national heritage and an inexpensive and relatively harmless means of providing healthy outdoor recreation for a large proportion of the population.

Nonetheless, the amenity campaigners felt they had achieved a great victory in persuading the Government to go against the wishes of the County Councils Association and adopt the recommendations of the Hobhouse Special Committee regarding the compulsory survey of rights of way. Under Sections 27 to 38 of the Act a survey had to be undertaken before the end of 1952. Procedures were specified, and a review of the published maps was to take place every five years. Disputes were to be settled at Quarter Sessions and Section 37 of the Act conferred powers on the Minister to expedite the survey

Another main concern of the campaigners had been the maintenance of public paths and Section 47 of the Act made this the responsibility of the highway authority (the county, borough or urban district council) instead of the existing unsatisfactory situation under the 1835

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<sup>1</sup> The Times 18th April 1949, p3a.

Highway Act under which it was a joint responsibility of the county and parish.

The 1949 Act also simplified the methods of creating and closing paths. Sections 42 to 45 dealt with the latter and contained the safeguard that all closures and diversions needed Ministerial confirmation. Sections 39 to 41 dealt with the power of local authorities to enter into footpath agreements and to make footpath orders (with compensation payable in both cases), although Ministerial approval was needed for orders. Of particular significance to long-distance footpaths was the provision under Section 41(1) whereby county councils could apply to the Minister for powers to create public paths in place of a rural district council and, further, that the Minister could himself make a public path order in some circumstances (S41(3)).

(b) Long-Distance Routes

The provisions of Part IV of the Act for rights of way were, of course, applicable to long-distance paths as well as to ordinary paths, and it was recognised that the footpath survey and the simplified methods of creating new rights of way would be particularly helpful to the planning and creation of long-distance routes. In addition, there were five clauses in Part IV of the Act and a further<sup>1</sup> one in Part VI concerned exclusively with long-distance routes.

Section 51 empowered the National Parks Commission to plan long-distance paths for walkers or horseriders, although there was little guidance as to the character of the routes. Consultation had to take place between the Commission and the relevant county councils, which had to provide information as required. Following consultations, the Commission could submit a report on a long-distance route proposal to the Minister of Housing and Local Government. The report had to

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

contain a map of the proposed route (no scale was specified) showing existing rights of way and it could also contain proposals for the creation, improvement and maintenance of the route, the provision of ferries and the provision of accommodation, meals and refreshments. It could recommend any necessary traffic restrictions along the line of the route and these, if approved, would be enforceable by the county council under Section 93 of the Act where "traffic would prejudice the use thereof by persons journeying on foot or on horseback." Finally, the report had to contain an estimate of the capital cost and annual maintenance costs of the proposal.

Section 52 authorised the Minister to approve, modify or reject a proposal. He had to intimate his decision to the Commission and relevant planning authorities but if he considered rejecting a report he had to consult the Commission before coming to a decision.

Sections 53 and 54 had been added during the passage of the Bill through Parliament and dealt respectively with ferries and with accommodation, meals and refreshments along the routes. In both cases the facilities were to be part of an approved proposal and would be created by the local authority or highway authority in respect of ferries. Powers included compulsory purchase but existing services were not to be jeopardised.

Section 55, also added by the Government during the passage of the Bill, presumably as the practicalities of the scheme were further considered, made the procedure for making variations in approved schemes for long-distance routes the same as for the original proposals. In addition, under Section 55(2) the Minister was able to make changes without these being instigated by the Commission.

Section 98 gave the Minister power to defray expenditure on long-distance paths and, as discussed previously, a distinction was made



between the creation and maintenance of the routes, which was provided for in the original Bill and on which "the Minister may defray expenditure", and new provisions for ferries and services on which he "may defray or contribute towards expenditure". Finally, Section 105 contained the default powers of the Minister allowing him, inter alia to expedite the creation of long-distance routes.

Barbara Castle had referred to the provisions for the paths as "the perfect machinery" even before the Bill was strengthened and at the Annual General Meeting of the Commons Society at the end of 1949, the newly-elected president, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, commented:

"I understand that those of your members who were specifically anxious for these routes are completely satisfied with what has been done. So that is also a great achievement."<sup>1</sup>

The advocates of long-distance paths felt they had done particularly well in the legislation.

## 8. CONCLUSION

At the very end of the decade the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act became law, much to the relief of the campaigners who, after pressing for the establishment of national parks and improved opportunities for the enjoyment of the countryside for over twenty years, were still uncertain until the last minute whether the measure would complete its Parliamentary passage in time.

There was elation that national parks had at last been given legal status, even though the Act achieved only a limited number of the campaigners' demands. In a way the case for national parks had been stronger in the mid-1940s than it was towards the end of the decade. As the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and the new framework created by the 1947 Act became established there were seen to be major conflicts between these and some of the main objectives of the amenity campaigners. In the event, the sheer weight of public opinion and the

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol IX, 1948-50, p181.

perseverance of Lewis Silkin brought about the Bill; but the legislation may have been very different had it been introduced in 1945 or 1946.

On the other hand, matters relating to footpaths and access were examined in official reports mainly in the context of national parks before the publication of the Hobhouse Special Committee Report in September 1947 and it is likely that, had legislation taken place in the mid-1940s, reform of footpaths and access might have applied only to national parks, which would have been particularly restricting for long-distance footpaths. However, there was also the possibility that separate legislation might have been passed for footpaths and access, had the various Ministers not insisted on considering amenity matters together. Such legislation could have established an Executive Footpaths Commission, an idea supported by the Scott Report and one pursued strongly by the Ramblers Association at first. A specific Footpaths Commission might well have made schemes for long-distance footpaths even more effective than the National Parks Commission was able to do. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that such a Footpaths Commission would have been acceptable to any Government of the day and, had the reform of footpaths taken place without the creation of a central coordinating agency, schemes for long-distance routes, had they been pursued at all, would have been left to the counties and would probably have been very different and more local than national in character.

The idea of having a central body to coordinate long-distance routes did arise but it was not strongly or consistently pursued by the amenity bodies or in the official reports until 1947. Indeed, the concept of having a legislative provision specifically for the planning and establishment of such paths came late, although the need

for Parliamentary intervention had been suggested in the article on the Pennine Way in the Manchester Guardian in April 1938. It had also been mentioned in the submission of the Pennine Way Association to the Scott Committee as one of a number of ways of establishing routes. This situation arose in part because the idea of a Pennine Way had dominated thinking on long-distance paths and such a route had already been planned and had an Association to coordinate the idea; what was needed for the Pennine Way were powers to create rights of way where these did not exist. It was thus only slowly that ideas for the systematic planning, coordinating and funding of long-distance routes evolved. Even the Hobhouse Special Report, which proposed that the National Parks Commission be responsible for planning routes which crossed more than one county and that national funding be available for the creation (but not maintenance) of the routes, spent more time summarising the development of the concept and offered neither a detailed exposition of a scheme for establishing the routes nor a definition of what a long-distance route was to be.

We have seen how the idea of long-distance paths developed slowly throughout the 1940s and how, after it came "the crown" of the Hobhouse recommendations on footpaths (as Tom Stephenson put it) it was incorporated into the Bill which eventually came before Parliament. The strong connection between the various objectives of the amenity movement, including national parks and access, as well as the reform of footpaths, has been demonstrated, the idea of long-distance paths (and the Pennine Way in particular) has also been indicated as something which caught the imagination of the media, politicians and outdoor recreationalists alike and was a particularly tangible objective of the amenity campaign. The idea of long-distance paths benefitted considerably from the force of the whole amenity



campaign but it also contributed disproportionately to it, as the MP's hike in 1948 demonstrated.

The disproportionate contribution of long-distance paths to the campaign occurred partly because of the attention they attracted and partly because they embodied the idea of a healthy outdoor pursuit, an idea particularly fashionable at the time, especially in Government circles. Again, it was mainly the concept and the benefits of the paths, rather than the practicalities of creating them that were discussed, and thus no obvious potential conflicts were established. It is clear from the submissions to the official committees and from statements in Parliament that there was universal acceptance of the idea of long-distance paths.

Once the general content of the Bill had been decided by the Government (based mainly on the Hobhouse Reports) the evidence shows that long-distance routes were to fare especially well in the bargaining between the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and the Treasury during the drafting of the Bill, at the expense of other provisions. The 100 percent grant for creating and maintaining the routes had not been even proposed by the amenity campaigners and emerged, as has been seen, during this period of deliberation and bargaining. The clauses on long-distance routes were further strengthened during the passage of the Bill through Parliament and thus the provisions for long-distance paths were to be among the strongest in the Act. As well as giving the National Park Commission an important planning function, long-distance routes were expected to prove particularly attractive to local authorities, in view of their unique 100 percent funding.

The next stage in the history of long-distance footpaths was to be the implementation of schemes and weaknesses in the measure soon

became clear. However, this was with hindsight and at the time it was felt that the legislation was sufficiently clear and flexible with safeguards to ensure that long-distance paths could be planned, created, maintained and financed smoothly and swiftly.

The idea of long-distance paths had not just been accepted: it had been incorporated wholeheartedly into the national recreation system and planning framework of England and Wales.

CHAPTER VI

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of the 1940s, some of the social reforms of the 'new beginning' of the post-war period were beginning to lose their popularity among the British people. However, the measures to reform the planning of the countryside for open-air recreation were very new and enjoyed widespread support. Thus, the 1950s were entered with high hopes for the preservation of the countryside and the development of its recreational facilities - of which long-distance routes were among the most prominent. This and the next two chapters trace the development of long-distance routes through the lifetime of the new National Parks Commission, from the very end of 1949 to 1968, and assess the provision in practice.

A preliminary appraisal of the records revealed a possible three-part division of the period from the point of view of long-distance routes - the early years, when the Commission got off to an enthusiastic and seemingly productive start; the middle years, from about 1955 to about 1963, which would seem to have been characterised by little progress and a general lack of interest in countryside matters, including long-distance routes; and the latter years of the Commission, when there were achievements and increasing interest in long-distance paths occurring amid important changes in attitude to the countryside and to recreational planning. These three divisions are the subject of Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively.

The sources for these chapters are the Commission's Annual Reports,



its unpublished minutes, Parliamentary records, newspaper reports, the personal recollections of former Commissioners and material from the amenity groups. The programme of the Commission is central to the story and its reaction to experience is stressed. Progress and problems encountered with the individual routes are summarised and developments outwith long-distance routes which had, or could have had, a bearing on their development are also assessed. This is the period during which the idea of long-distance paths in the countryside would be translated into a reality.

## 2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION

Immediately after the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act became law, in December 1949, Lewis Silkin, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, named the new eleven-man Commission. It included Lord Merthyr, Tom Stephenson and Francis Ritchie from the Hobhouse Special Committee, and Pauline Dower, the widow of John Dower<sup>1</sup>. An editorial in the Times felt that the Commission was slightly too political, but otherwise well balanced<sup>2</sup> although elsewhere there was concern that it had little planning experience among its members.

That two prominent members of the Ramblers Association, Ritchie and Stephenson, were Commissioners was significant. Silkin stressed at the first meeting that they were there in the national interest, not representing the Association<sup>3</sup>, and, indeed, both were executive officials of other groups and had been prominent in the campaign as individuals. Nonetheless, these appointments did illustrate the importance of the Ramblers Association at the end of the 1940s and Ritchie's comment in the Countrygoer in Spring, 1950, is particularly apt: "The preservation movement in this country has always been predominantly aristocratic in its concepts and upper class in its

<sup>1</sup> John Dower had died in 1947.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 19th December 1949, p5c.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson May 1979.

direction," he asserted, however:

"During the past few years the RA has come, I think, to assume a position of great importance in leading the popular side of this movement, combining the aspects of enjoyment (upon which the YHA and holiday organisations must perforce concentrate) with preservation. For the first time the movement for the preservation of the countryside is becoming a popular one, of the people and by the people as well as for the people. Of this popular movement the Ramblers Association, which is not encumbered with bricks and mortar, finds itself the natural leader. Without the preliminary work of the RA the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill would probably have been merely the National Parks Bill.<sup>1</sup>

In its early years there was considerable scope for individual Commissioners to take a leading role in the activities of the Commission, partly because the staff was very small and had very little expertise in countryside matters<sup>2</sup> and, as well as being very influential, Stephenson and Ritchie were to be particularly active and useful members of the Commission. Along with Pauline Dower, in particular, these two had practical experience of the amenity campaign and of many parts of the countryside of England and Wales, especially the upland areas which were potential national parks.

Silkin was enthusiastic about the Commission, giving it good publicity in its early days, although, following the General Election in February 1950 (in which the Labour Party was returned with a decreased majority) he was replaced as Minister by Hugh Dalton. Dalton was perhaps even more enthusiastic about the work of the Commission and he continued to encourage it. In addition, the Ministry published a pamphlet on the 1949 Act, stressing its importance:

"It may be said that for the first time in English history an Act has been passed by Parliament with the object of setting out in a workable form a comprehensive charter of rights for all lovers of open air."<sup>3</sup>

Dalton had more extreme ideas than Silkin. For example he had said during the Government deliberations on the Bill: "We shall have no

<sup>1</sup> The Countrygoer vol 20, Spring 1950. p78.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Stephenson, Yapp and Ritchie, May 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning National Parks and Access to the Countryside (GTB 1), 1950.



peace round the Peak until we have paid off the Dukes,"<sup>1</sup> and he advocated large-scale public acquisition of land in national parks. Even though the Commission began its work with great enthusiasm and had made the first order designating a national park (the Peak District)<sup>2</sup> by the end of 1950, nonetheless, Dalton expressed impatience and in the Commission's first Annual Report for the year ending 30th September 1950, he had declared his disappointment that<sup>3</sup> three parks had not been designated by then.

He may have felt some disappointment with the progress on long-distance routes as well, for at a press conference in March, 1950, he had stated that "The Pennine Way, another public amenity, would<sup>4</sup> probably be opened this year." Nonetheless, despite the fact that the Pennine Way certainly did not open in 1950, the Commission did make considerable progress with their long-distance route programme from the beginning.

### 3. THE PENNINE-WAY

#### (a) The Report

At the second meeting of the Commission, in March, 1950, several possible long-distance routes were discussed and it was decided to set up the first sub-committee of the Commission, to deal with the Pennine<sup>5</sup> Way in particular and other long-distance paths in general. The Long-Distance Routes Sub-committee was to be chaired by Tom Stephenson, who could report the following month that maps based on those prepared by the Pennine Way Association immediately before the outbreak of war had been sent to all the counties along the route, to<sup>6</sup> ascertain its legal status. At this meeting the Commission decided

<sup>1</sup> Cherry op.cit. p101.      <sup>2</sup> The Times 29th December 1950, p3e.

<sup>3</sup> First Annual Report of the National Parks Commission, 1950, preface

(for full reference to this and subsequent Reports see Bibliography)

<sup>4</sup> The Times 9th March 1950, p6g.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Minute 50/2 item 17.

<sup>6</sup> NPC Minute 50/3 (1st April 1950).



that it would not have to wait until the definitive maps of footpaths were available before making a report on a potential long-distance route, a decision which turned out to be fortunate considering the extreme delays which were to be encountered with the maps.

Stephenson could now use his position as Secretary of the Ramblers Association to gain publicity and, for example, he was featured in the Times at the end of December 1950, announcing that formal consultations had begun with the plan for the Pennine Way having been sent to the local authorities concerned. When their observations had been received, the plan would go to the Minister "who could then make an order creating the path, which would involve making some 70 miles<sup>1</sup> (112 km) of new footpaths to link up with existing rights of way."

The report for the Minister was prepared by the sub-committee,<sup>2</sup> endorsed by the Commission at its meeting in April 1951 and submitted to him on 21st June 1951. It was just five pages in<sup>3</sup> length with the statutory map (submitted at the scale of one inch to one mile - 1:63360 - apart from sections where new rights of way would be needed, which were submitted at 2 1/2 inches to a mile - 1:25000). The nine county councils and 24 district councils involved had made various recommendations during the statutory consultations and some of these had been incorporated into the report, notably two bad-weather alternative loops. The Commission was at pains to stress the informal nature of the route as it was envisaged and the limited number of improvements which would be necessary. It considered that the Pennine Way should be predominantly a walking route, although some bridle paths were incorporated in the plan. At this stage it must have been decided that creating the right of way was the priority and proposals for accommodation and other facilities were not made in the report.

<sup>1</sup> The Times 29th December 1950, p3e.

<sup>2</sup> NPC/M/51/4 - 10th April 1951.

<sup>3</sup> NPC The Pennine Way Report to the Minister (LR 1), June 1951.

The capital costs of the 250 mile (400 km) route were estimated at £8,750 as follows:

1. Cost of repairs and improvements to existing paths	£700
2. For existing and new paths -	
100 new stiles @ average £8	£800
30 new gates @ average £9	£270
30 new bridges @ £150 each	£3,000
75 signs @ £4	£300
Other work (including cost of transporting stone for cairns to be built by voluntary workers)	£200
3. Estimated costs of creating new rights of way recommended in the report.	£3,300
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TOTAL £8,570

In addition, the average expenditure for maintenance was estimated at £500 to £700 per annum.<sup>1</sup>

Dalton (whose title had by now changed to Minister of Local Government and Planning)<sup>2</sup> approved the proposal in just 15 days and he announced to the local authorities that he hoped the necessary rights of way would be created to complete the route by the beginning of April 1952.<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence of his having considered creating the whole route with an order making the necessary rights of way as Stephenson had seemed to suggest in the Times article. Nevertheless, the Manchester Guardian reported in July 1951, announcing the Minister's approval of the route, that he had said: "If they [the local authorities] can secure these [70 miles of new rights of way] by voluntary agreement, well and good. If not, I shall not hesitate to authorise compulsory powers"<sup>4</sup>

(b) Problems with the Pennine Way -the Warcop Range

At the very first meeting of the National Park Commission, Tom Stephenson had presented a paper drawing attention to the threat of the development of the Warcop Firing Range (in Upper Teesdale) which,

<sup>1</sup> Pennine Way op.cit..

<sup>2</sup> On 6th June 1951.

<sup>3</sup> Manchester Guardian 7th July 1951, p3a-b.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

he maintained, would sever the Pennine Way.<sup>1</sup> The Times reported that the Annual Council Meeting of the Ramblers Association in March 1950 had also focussed on this threat, passing a resolution opposing "the adoption of such a proposal [which] will prevent access to one of the finest parts of the Pennine Way."<sup>2</sup> However, at a meeting of the Ramblers Association Stephenson was able to announce that a deputation from the Commission was going to see the Chief of the General Staff and this meeting took place in April 1950. When Barbara Castle asked the first of two questions about this issue in the House of Commons, Dalton could reply that the threat to the Pennine Way had been removed following his request to the Secretary of State for War that the proposal be reconsidered. The Secretary of State had assured him that "this beautiful and popular footpath will not be interfered with in any way by the long-term proposals of the War Office."<sup>3</sup>

Dalton reiterated this in a speech on the work on the Commission a year later and the Times gave prominence to this particular point, headlining an article 'Pennine Way Open'. After referring to his "treaty with the War Office by which this Pennine Pilgrims Way would be kept permanently open", Dalton was reported as having asserted that "The whole of this long-distance route from the Scottish border down to Edale, Derbyshire, I want to see free for our young people to enjoy and exercise upon."<sup>4</sup>

As well as attracting useful publicity, this was a major victory for the amenity lobby and the Commission and hopes were high for the rapid creation of long-distance paths in general and the Pennine Way in particular.

<sup>1</sup> NPC Minute 50/1, 7th February 1950.    <sup>2</sup> The Times 27th March 1950, p2g.  
<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1950-51 vol 474 col 30, 20th April 1950.  
<sup>4</sup> The Times 1st June 1951, p3d.



(c) The Kinder Scout Enquiry

However, following the Minister's approval of the route, more problems began to appear. A major one concerned the opening up of the remoter parts of the Pennines to inexperienced walkers, a concern raised in the 1930s. There were those who argued that there were dangers in creating a publicised right of way over some parts of the Pennines. Once again the point was made by Stephenson and others that the Pennine Way would not attract inexperienced walkers, and the report to the Minister had emphasised:

"The Pennine Way will be entirely different in character from the normal pleasure walk; it will be a strenuous high-level route through predominantly wild country and intended for walkers of some experience. It will involve a fair element of physical exertion and willingness to endure rough going.....The Commission consider it would be undesirable to make [the wild moorland] sections suitable for people unaccustomed to rough mountain walking."<sup>1</sup>

The second Annual Report of the Commission echoed this, stating that "sections of the route can be traversed only by strong walkers, and in bad weather they can be safely negotiated only by people who can steer a course by map and compass."<sup>2</sup>

However, there were objectors who felt that waymarking would be necessary and that this would destroy the character of the moorlands. The Commission denied this and stressed the limited nature of improvements which would be undertaken. In fact, the local authorities which were consulted seem to have envisaged a more formal route than that envisaged by the Commission (and the Pennine Way Association), and the Commission had been at pains to stress to the Minister:

"The Commission are anxious that the appearance of the path should harmonise with the character of the country in which they occur and they are of the opinion that very little work will need to be done to make them usable by persons likely to undertake a walk of this kind."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pennine Way (Report) op.cit.p2.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Second Report (1951), p4.

<sup>3</sup> Pennine Way op.cit.pp3-4.

The Annual Report referred to the limited improvements needed and compared what was envisaged with the rough mountain tracks in the Lake District and North Wales.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, concern increased and it focussed on the south end of the route. The Manchester Guardian had generally been enthusiastic about the Pennine Way, for example, publishing a series of photographs of the route during the summer of 1951. However, an editorial in the paper following the Minister's approval had suggested an easier route over Kinder Scout would have been better. It claimed that local authorities had preferred "one of several easier and safer routes that would not involve crossing the trackless wastes of peat on the tops of Kinder and Bleaklaw," continuing:

"In support of this cautious view it is urged that the Pennine Way is not meant to be enjoyed only by the hardened expert, whose interests can be better met by the making of an access order allowing him to roam at will over the uncultivated heights; and second that the local authority will be responsible for the maintenance of the path and the safety of those who use it."<sup>2</sup>

It reasoned that the latter point could lead to overconstruction.

The subheading of this report had read 'Mr Dalton in Favour of Path for the Hardy' and he was a particularly strong supporter of the Commission's route. However, in the General Election of October, 1951, a Conservative Government was returned and Dalton was replaced by Harold MacMillan, who became Minister of Housing and Local Government. His attitudes to countryside amenity were very different to Dalton's and the amenity lobby was concerned at possible implications of the change to the development of countryside facilities.

Meanwhile, Phil Barnes, now with the CPRE, and others arranged a meeting under the auspices of the Council to oppose the Pennine Way on Kinder Scout, and this meeting called for a public inquiry. When Tom Stephenson reported to the Commission in November 1951 that the

<sup>1</sup> NPC Second Report (1951) p4.

<sup>2</sup> Manchester Guardian 7th July 1951 op.cit.

Minister had not acceded to this there was relief but this turned to disappointment when in February 1952 it was learned that MacMillan had, after all, agreed to hold an inquiry - without consulting the Commission.

The public inquiry took place at Chapel-en-le-Frith in March 1952 and the Commission's representatives stressed that the dangers had been greatly exaggerated and that a right of way was unlikely to detract from the character of the moorland. The opponents of the plan asserted their points that the adventurous challenge of Kinder or Bleaklow could be lost with a cairned or staked path (the position the Pennine Club took), that disfigurement and erosion could be caused to Grindsbrook Valley (the CPRE contention), that such a path should avoid possible danger (the position of the Fellowship of Fell Walkers), and that people would be prevented from finding their own way over the moors (the complaint of the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club).<sup>1</sup>

The lead item of Home News in the Times following the inquiry was entitled 'Pennine Way Change' although it was in fact a compromise that had been agreed. The suggestion was that an alternative loop route should be made, running west from Edale via Jacob's Ladder - although the Commission was adamant that the original line should be available as well.<sup>2</sup>

The original route received support in the House of Commons in June, when three questions were asked concerning the Pennine Way. Dalton, one of the questioners, asserted that:

"A great deal of nonsense has been talked about the alleged danger of Kinder Scout. In company of some friends I spent Whitsun there and we formed the view that it was much less dangerous to walk across Kinder Scout than to walk across Whitehall." <sup>3</sup>

However, Peter Roberts, the Member for Sheffield, urged the Minister not to be influenced by Dalton.

<sup>1</sup> The Times 22nd March 1952, p3a.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>3</sup> HC Debates 1951-52 vol 502 cols 983-4, 17th June 1952.



The eagerly-awaited ruling of the Minister became known in July 1952. He accepted the recommendation that there be two alternative routes and he invited the Commission to prepare a Varying Report<sup>1</sup> which it did after the necessary statutory consultations. The original start to the Pennine Way was thus retained and a second threat to the integrity of the Way had been averted. Nonetheless the Commission had lost some face and the first real opposition to the Pennine Way had taken place - ironically from some user groups.

(d) Water Undertakers

A further problem arose at the southern end of the route, concerning the gathering grounds. This time the problem proved difficult to resolve satisfactorily in all cases, although in the first case the decision was eventually made in favour of the Commission's route across one catchment area.

Holmfirth UDC had made a footpath order (one of the first under the 1949 Act) to create part of the bad-weather loop near Black Hill. The landowners, Huddersfield Corporation, had objected, asserting that the path would be a danger to public health, crossing feeder streams. An inquiry was held in May 1954 and the Commission argued that three lines of defence (long storage, filtration and sterilisation) safeguarded the purity of the drinking water and that any element of risk was so minimal as to fail to justify abandoning a route devised for the safety of walkers. The Commission was backed by the Peak Park Planning Board and various amenity groups and the Minister confirmed the order in June 1954.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, this loop route was still to present a problem because in the Colne Valley the Rural District Council, the Commission and Huddersfield Corporation had agreed to a deviation of the route to avoid more feeder streams. However, on this occasion the Peak Park

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<sup>1</sup> Under Section 55 of the 1949 Act.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Fifth Report (1954), pl4, Appendix E, p49, letter dated 14th July 1954.

Planning Board objected, asserting that this change made the route unsafe. The problem was finally resolved after two years' negotiations; when the parties accepted a plan to waymark the path with cairns and stakes and in May 1956 the Minister approved a Varying Report for this.<sup>1</sup>

The third incident was not to be resolved to the satisfaction of the Commission or amenity groups for a very long time. This also occurred in 1954 and concerned Longdendale in the Peak District National Park. This time it was Manchester Corporation that objected to the line of the route on public health grounds and the Corporation put forward an alternative line for the route which it felt would be acceptable. The Commission asserted that the arguments against the approved route were unsound, particularly as two main roads and a railway ran alongside the reservoirs in question and because, in a similar situation beside Thirlmere in the Lake District, free public access was allowed over the catchment area owned by Manchester Corporation. The Commission did look at the alternative which had been proposed but concluded that it was potentially more dangerous and more difficult to trace than the original.

The Ministry held an inquiry at the end of July 1954 and this was widely reported. Manchester Corporation argued that the approved line for the route would introduce "quite intolerable risks" and that adequate safeguards such as those discussed in the Gathering Grounds Report were not applicable to the Longdendale reservoirs at that time. The Commission argued that the dangers were being exaggerated - "the age old apprehension of water undertakings"<sup>2</sup> - and it was backed by various amenity groups. These groups preferred the original route because of better scenery and easier access to popular features. The Peak District and Northern Footpath Preservation Society suggested

<sup>1</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), p17.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 30th July 1954, p5f.

that patrols were the answer to combat any risk of pollution.

At the inquiry Manchester Corporation advanced a further alternative route and it was agreed that the Commission should examine this. The Commission subsequently reported to the Minister that it felt the new suggestion was more dangerous in bad weather and that it took walkers close to a firing range. However, it conceded that it would be prepared to accept the route if the original was retained for use in bad weather.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1954, the Minister (now Duncan Sandys) gave his decision in a very long letter<sup>2</sup> in favour of Manchester Corporation. The Minister did not want to take the risk of blame for an epidemic and he cited the opinion of experts from the Ministry who agreed with the Corporation's experts that the risk of danger might be increased. He asserted that, while the new route may be difficult, it would not be as bad as some other parts of the Pennine Way and he satisfied himself that the rifle range presented a negligible danger. Nonetheless, he allowed that, if Manchester was to introduce<sup>3</sup> filtration plants, the situation would change.

The Minister made a direction under Section 55(2)<sup>4</sup> of the Act and the Commission recorded his decision "with regret".<sup>5</sup> In March 1955 a Sheffield MP angrily raised the issue in Parliament, complaining that:

"the prospect of pollution from hikers going over those streams is infinitesimal compared with that now going on from buildings alongside the railway and reservoir...[the Minister] has routed the Pennine Way through a bog and in wet weather hikers will have to go back to the original route if they do not want to get up to their knees in mud."

He even raised a point of order that he received an unsatisfactory answer<sup>6</sup> to his question. The Commons Society suggested that Manchester had taken its stance because of the importance of shooting interests in the area<sup>7</sup> and the amenity lobby as well as the Commission felt the decision was a great blow.

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fifth Report (1954) ppl4-15. <sup>2</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955) pp47-49.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 31st December 1954, p4b.

<sup>4</sup> Varying the route without a Varying Report having been submitted.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955) pl3.

<sup>6</sup> HC Reports 1954-55 vol 538 cols 138-9, 8th March 1955.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol X, 1955, pp236-241.



(e) Waymarking

The waymarking of the Pennine Way became a practical problem once the Minister had given his approval to the route. In its report, the Commission had treated this controversial question very carefully, recording that simple cairns, made of stone or turf (like some existing parish boundary markers), should be constructed on higher ground, with stakes being used where cairns were impractical, and that<sup>1</sup> on lower ground distinctive and uniform signs be used.

The cost estimate for the route had included a sum for transporting stone for use by volunteers in constructing cairns. The Commission's 5th and 6th Annual Reports publicised the offer of the Ramblers Association to assist local authorities (the county councils as highway authorities) in way-marking, but it seems that the offer was slow in being taken up. The Times reported in November 1952 that Derbyshire County Council was hoping to recruit volunteers for the<sup>2</sup> task of waymarking, but in fact it seems that it was not until October 1954 that volunteer way-marking of the route began - and this<sup>3</sup> was along three upland sections of the route in Yorkshire. The following year the Commission was able to report that the Pennine Way had been satisfactorily way-marked throughout the North Riding of Yorkshire and cairn-building had been completed over 61 miles (98 km)<sup>4</sup> or 82% of the West Riding.

The Commission decided on the design of a standard sign in mid-1952, having consulted the Royal Fine Arts Commission, and in August 1952 the Times reported that MacMillan had accepted the design and had

1 Pennine Way (Report) op.cit. p4.

2 The Times 6th November 1952, p2b.

3 NPC Sixth Report (1955) pl4.

4 NPC Seventh Report (1956) pl7.

written to the local authorities commending its use and stating that the cost would be reimbursed.<sup>1</sup> The following day the paper carried an editorial on the Pennine Way sign, entering into the debate over the waymarking of the route.<sup>2</sup>

It asserted that this presented a "very real dilemma" and was part of the problem of making the countryside more accessible "without spoiling or even destroying the thing which it is hoped that people will enjoy" - which in the case of the Pennine Way was the impression of remoteness and solitude and "the spice of uncertainty and adventure".

The Times referred to the moorlands of the Pennines:

"In them a man can feel himself momentarily free from the restrictions which a city life makes inevitable. On the fells and hilltops he can have at least the illusion of liberty. He can also, if he is a good countryman, know the satisfaction of finding his own way about by means of a map and his own wits." <sup>3</sup>

However, the editorial concluded that some waymarking was inevitable but that it must be done with "great discretion".

This generated a correspondence in the Times through the rest of August, which raised some of the issues and opinions aired first in the same newspaper fourteen years previously. Flashes of paint were preferred to cairns by the first correspondent; the second felt that flashes were worse than signposts, and that "by definition" paths destroy solitude.<sup>4</sup> Later a correspondent recommended that signing should be limited and that local maps of routes should be available. A Tavistock man noted that the monks marked tracks across Dartmoor with granite crosses - "What could be less obtrusive or more comforting to the wayfarer than the sign of the cross?" he asked.<sup>5</sup> A further writer suggested monoliths, with distances hewn on them. As in the correspondence in 1938, a letter cited overseas experience, this time the Japanese practice of using short, painted posts.

<sup>1</sup> The Times 18th August 1952, p2c.      <sup>2</sup> The Times 19th August 1952, p5c.  
<sup>3</sup> ibid.      <sup>4</sup> The Times 23rd August 1952 p5f.  
<sup>5</sup> The Times 25th August 1952, p5a.



One letter recounted the experiences of a man who had walked 140 miles (225 km) along the Pennine Way from Kirk Yetholm.<sup>1</sup> He endorsed the need for "some simple yet effective system of waymarking", making the point that "at present walking the Pennine Way is in the nature of a major operation, needing 10 Ordnance Survey sheets". This correspondent introduced some sensible and practical points, including one that stakes be used as temporary waymarks, being removed once the path was visible on the ground. The writer also made the point that the Pennine Way and other long-distance paths would provide an introduction to British people and foreigners to the mountains and moorlands of the country and that, as these people would have to have booked into hostels or other accommodation, they would be on a fixed timetable and would have to walk in all weathers, some waymarking was therefore essential. He criticised "those who would ban all waymarking on the Pennine Way and keep it for the choice selected few".<sup>2</sup> This illustrates the sort of practical suggestions for the management of the Pennine Way which were increasingly put forward as people began hiking the path, following publication of details of the route.

The correspondence concerning the waymarking of the Pennine Way was revived in the Times at the end of March 1954, with one hiker complaining that the Pennine Way was a misnomer because there was no developed 'way' at all. However, two subsequent correspondents reiterated the point that waymarking should not take place (including one writer who advocated walking with a half-inch - 1:18315 - map and throwing stones to locate precipices!<sup>3</sup>) The Times featured a picture of the Commission's oak sign for the Pennine Way in April 1954, together with a photograph of the route and the caption 'Pennine Way - A Signposting Problem'.<sup>4</sup> It continued its fascination with the subject

<sup>1</sup> The Times 27th August 1952 p5e.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 29th March 1954 p7d.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Times 1st April 1954 p12.



into 1955, reporting that the West Riding Highways Department had set up 35 signs and 130 cairns on the Pennine Way, at a cost of £350<sup>1</sup>.

The Commission could claim success with its waymarking policy, although it became clear that some supplementary signing of the route would be necessary. An article on the Pennine Way in the Journal of the Commons Society in 1952, for example, had felt "some simple sign is also required along the lines of that used on the Appalachian Trail which could be inconspicuously affixed to the gates and stiles.... and stencilled."<sup>2</sup> However, no decisions were made at this stage on such supplementary waymarking.

(f) Accommodation and Publicity

Although the Commission made no recommendations for creating additional accommodation along the Pennine Way in its report, the issue was considered. The YHA had made some suggestions in 1951 but after discussion on this, a Commission minute in January 1952 recorded:

"The Chairman drew the Commission's attention to the advisability at this present time of financial stringency of not putting forward any proposals involving expenditure, unless they could be shown to be urgently and indisputably required."<sup>3</sup>

Lord Lucan criticised the lack of amenities being developed on the Pennine Way in a debate in the Lords in 1953,<sup>4</sup> and the Guardian had criticised the Commission for not including accommodation in its report to the Minister. However, there is relatively little reference to this subject during the 1950s although the issue of accommodation in the Peak District was raised twice in 1955. Firstly, the Third Report of the Peak Planning Board referred to discussions between the Board and the YHA for a hostel in Longdendale, which was badly needed because of the large gap between places offering accommodation at the southern end of the route.<sup>5</sup> In fact, negotiations proved to be time

<sup>1</sup> The Times 17th January 1955 p4g.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol X 1951-52, p238.

<sup>3</sup> NPC/M/52/1 - 8th January 1952.

<sup>4</sup> HL Reports 1952-53 vol 182 col 616, 19th May 1953.

<sup>5</sup> The Times 6th October 1955, p5c.

consuming and this project was not to reach fruition for a further ten years. The second involved another aspect of the impact of water authorities in the Pennines. It concerned the Isle of Skye Inn, which was famous among northern fell-walkers, and efforts to keep it open following Huddersfield Corporation's fears that disposal of untreated sewage from the inn was a health hazard. The brewery which owned the inn proposed a scheme for the disposal of sewage but it needed the Peak Park Planning Board's financial help. The Board agreed to assist with the capital costs but refused to help with the running costs<sup>1</sup> - a decision supported by the National Park Commission<sup>2</sup> which felt that spending money on a youth hostel would be better. The result was that the inn closed and the southern end of the Pennine Way was even worse off for accommodation and places offering refreshments.

In respect of publicising the route, it was soon realised that the slowness of creation was presenting a dilemma. The route could not be shown on maps or be described in detail in official guide books before it became a right of way. Tom Stephenson arranged for the Ordnance Survey to produce a number of maps of the Pennine Way (settled eventually at 15,000 to sell at 7/6d. each) - but this eventually had to be abandoned.<sup>3</sup> In fact, although the need for maps was felt, several accounts of the route were published (for example, one in Country and Travel in 1951) and the Ramblers Association provided much publicity material, including the first authoritative description of the Pennine Way (in 1952) and accommodation lists.<sup>4</sup>

(g) Slowness of Creating the Pennine Way

The last problem to be faced proved impossible to resolve and was to be one which had dogged the creation of long-distance paths in Great Britain from the Pennine Way onwards. This was the extremely

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955) p14.      <sup>2</sup> NPC/M/55/6

<sup>3</sup> NPC/M/52/7 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol X, 1952, p240.



slow rate of progress in making the additional rights of way needed to complete the route.

Dalton had stated that he hoped the route would be open within a year of his approving the proposal (that is, by April, 1952). However, by that time no additional rights of way had been secured. In June 1952 Ernest Marples, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, addressed a CPRE meeting and, although several major issues were covered, the comments on the Pennine Way were singled out by the Times in its report which was headlined 'Pennine Way Path - Reply to Criticism of Slowness'. Marples regretted the lack of progress but he cautioned against hurrying the process and he gave assurances that "the Minister has set his heart on the Pennine Way"<sup>1</sup>. He reported that of the 22 local authorities concerned with the 70 miles (113 km) of the route needing new rights of way, two had completed preparations, covering three miles, twelve were "getting on with work" on their 25 miles (40 km), one was delayed by the Kinder Scout problem, and seven had not yet given the Ministry the information it had requested.

In fact, one authority was unaccounted for, and this was picked up by Anthony Greenwood during the Supply Debate in the House of Commons the following month. He asked: "Has the Minister no timetable for when the paths are to be created? Has he not urged upon the local authorities concerned the importance of pushing ahead with the work?" MacMillan blamed the Kinder Scout inquiry: "If it had not been for that inquiry, I think it would have been ready by Easter, but owing to the inquiry it will not be ready until the end of autumn."<sup>2</sup>

The Times reported on Greenwood's concern that the government was "soft-pedalling the development of National Parks and Long Distance footpaths"<sup>3</sup> and the following day published a photograph of the

<sup>1</sup> The Times 23rd June 1952, p4b.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1951-52 vol 503 cols 1905 & 1937, 14th July 1952.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 5th July 1952, p8c.



Pennine Way at Grindsbrook, confirming that it was now hoped that the route would be open by the end of 1952.

However, in May 1953 MacMillan replied to a Parliamentary Question by George Chetwynd that only 22  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles (36 km) of new rights of way had been created along the Pennine Way, although "work is progressing well on the legal procedure for creating the remaining 68  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles [110 km] which are needed to complete the whole 250 miles [400 km] of the Way"<sup>1</sup> No more predictions were being made, but it is amazing that it was taking such time for the reality of the situation and the complexity of creating a long-distance path to be realised.

The National Parks Commission's Fourth Annual Report recorded that at the end of September 1953 just 27 miles (43 km) of new rights of way had been created out of what was now officially 91 miles (147 km) of new rights of way needed.<sup>2</sup> The extra mileage came about as further information about the status of presumed rights of way became available and also because as more precise measurements took place it was realised that the Pennine Way was more like 270 miles (435 km) in length. In addition the loop routes would add to the length.

In March 1954 the Minister was again questioned on progress, this time by both Chetwynd and Blenkinsop. The reply was that 38 miles (64 km) had now been created, 2 miles (3 km) found to exist, and 51 miles (81 km) were still under negotiation. Chetwynd noted that the route was being created at a mile a month and that it would be at least five years before the route would be completed at the present rate.<sup>3</sup>

However, the government spokesman, Marples, replied that:

"Owing to the legal complexities involved [I] cannot yet say when the whole route will be formally completed, but apart from a few controversial stretches, amounting in all to about eight miles [13 km] the Way is open in practice to walkers throughout the whole 250 miles [400 km]"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1952-53 vol 515 col 70, 12th May 1953.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Fourth Report (1953) p8.

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1953-54 vol 525 cols 199-201, 16th March 1954.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

This argument was to be used increasingly frequently by the government, that routes were, in fact, effectively open to hikers, even if sections were not yet formal rights of way.

This had been the response of the Government spokesman during a debate in the House of Lords in May 1953 on the Annual Report of the National Parks Commission. Lord Mancroft had said that slowness was inevitable and he predicted that the route would be tied up for a long time. However, he maintained that "the Pennine Way has actually been traversed without difficulty."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Journal of the Commons Society had claimed in 1952 that the route was in practice open to walkers.<sup>2</sup>

The Report of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for 1950/1 - 1954 (which had a lot to say on long-distance routes) emphasised this point, stating that "most landowners have allowed the public to use the route pending the creation of the legal right of way", adding that:

"wherever possible, public path agreements are made with landowners in preference to orders; but even when landowners are willing, the legal complexities of creating a new right of way have taken longer to resolve than was expected."<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, in the House of Lords the Earl of Lucan expressed his concern at the lack of progress with the Pennine Way and claimed that ramblers still encountered gamekeepers and water bailiffs objecting to their presence.<sup>4</sup> The Times reported this, and also that shortly after Marples' statement the Northern Council of the Ramblers Association passed a resolution expressing "dismay" at the slow progress. It pointed out that the Pennine Way was not open and that Marples' eight miles (13 km) did not include Mill Hill, Longdendale, Black Hill or Pen y Ghent where there was still evidence of hikers being turned off the line of the Way.<sup>5</sup>

Marples had also claimed in the House of Commons to have himself

<sup>1</sup> HL Reports 1952-53 vol 182 cols 616 & 642, 19th May 1953.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol X, 1952, p239. <sup>3</sup> Cmd 9559, 1955, p85.

<sup>4</sup> HL Reports 1953-54 vol 525 col 199, 16th March 1954.

<sup>5</sup> The Times 12th April 1954, p2f.

walked the Pennine Way, provoking the question how he had avoided being shot or prosecuted. The Pennine Way was continuing to attract considerable publicity from the media and, two days after the Times<sup>1</sup> reported this, it published a letter from Tom Stephenson criticising Marples for his complacency and placing blame for lack of progress<sup>2</sup> squarely on the Ministry.

The Fifth Report of the Commission recorded disappointment that only  $24\frac{1}{2}$  more miles (39 km) had been created up to the end of September 1954, leaving  $38\frac{1}{2}$  miles (62 km) outstanding.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission had discussed the slow rate of progress as early as July 1952 and, at its meeting in April 1953, the minute recorded that "great dissatisfaction was expressed at the slow rate of progress."<sup>4</sup> Tom Stephenson argued that this was a concern of the Commission despite the fact that its statutory responsibilities ceased once it had reported to the Minister on a route or a modification thereof. This was to lead to a major reappraisal of the Commission's programme for long-distance routes at the beginning of 1954 and this is examined later in the chapter.

One particular section of the route which caused problems was in Bellingham Rural District in Northumberland. It had been reported to the Commission in February 1953 that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry had written a personal letter to the Council Chairman, threatening action under Section 41(1) of the Act, by which the Minister could charge the county council to take over the district council's responsibility for the creation of footpaths if progress was<sup>5</sup> not forthcoming. However, five months later it was reported that the

Council was about to open negotiations with landowners and the threat  
1 The Times 17th March 1954, p6d.    2 The Times 19th March 1954, p7d.  
3 NPC Fifth Report (1954), p14.    4 NPC/M/53/4, 14th April 1953.  
5 NPC/M/53/2, 10th February 1953.



was not carried through. Nonetheless, concern was still felt at the "lack of progress" in Northumberland, despite the fact that Tom Stephenson visited the clerks of Bellingham, Rothbury and Haltwistle RDC's in November 1953.<sup>1</sup> This section was to the the last to be resolved, even after the County Council had eventually taken over footpath responsibilities.

Concern was to continue over the slow rate of progress in implementing the Pennine Way and this concern would eventually dominate the Commission's programme for long distance-routes.

#### 4. OTHER LONG DISTANCE PATHS

##### (a) The Programme of the Commission

The Pennine Way dominated the Commission's programme of long-distance routes but nonetheless the Commission did set about considering other possibilities with considerable enthusiasm in its early years. The Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee decided in May 1950 that, beyond the Pennine Way, there should be no order of priority for the routes under consideration.<sup>2</sup> In consequence, a great deal of preliminary work was done on a number of routes, including most of those recommended by the Hobhouse Special Committee.

There is little evidence of any consideration of criteria for selecting potential routes, probably because the Hobhouse recommendations had presented what seemed a workable number of possible routes, and these had already been accepted in principle. However, there were routes proposed to the Commission by outside groups. Most of these seem to have been examined in a fairly arbitrary fashion and few were rejected outright. Nonetheless, two were rejected early in the programme and these do give an insight into the thinking of the Commission as to what did constitute a long-

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<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/53/10, 10th November 1953.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Minute 50/4, 23rd May 1950.

distance route.

The first of these was the line of the former Welsh Highland Railway, suggested as a potential route by the Liverpool branch of the Ramblers Association early in 1950. In fact, the proposal had first been made in the mid-1940s. The light railway (between Dinas and Portmadoc) had been closed in 1937 and it had been suggested that it be acquired as a walking route similar to that in the Manifold Valley in Derbyshire. "Almost unanimous" approval from local authorities had been forthcoming for the Welsh route and an appeal for funds to acquire the line was launched. However, nothing seems to have become<sup>1</sup> of this. The proposal that it be made an official long-distance route generated an important discussion by the Commission on the meaning of the provision in the Act. The Chairman argued that the Pennine Way and the Thames Towpath had been in mind during the passage of the Bill ("with at least one or two routes traversing the country"). He recommended that the Commission should not waste manpower on routes likely to be disqualified and he felt that this would be the case with the Welsh Highland Railway, partly because he did not consider its character to be of high enough quality but mainly because the route<sup>2</sup> was only 25 miles (40 km) in length. The fact that it would have cost £10,000 to purchase may also have been an important factor. The Ministry in fact confirmed that the railway by itself would not be<sup>3</sup> entertained as a long-distance route.

The second proposal made in 1953 was that a disused railway linking Alnwick with the Pennine Way be made an official long-distance route. This was rejected because it was felt that it would not be comparable scenically with the Pennine Way, because it would not stand in its own right as a long-distance route and because the cost of necessary work,<sup>4</sup> particularly in maintaining bridges, would be prohibitive.

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol VII 1955, pp96 & 252-4.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Minute 50/3, 18th April 1950.      <sup>3</sup> NPC Minute 50/4 op.cit..

<sup>4</sup> NPC/M/53/4, 14th April 1953.

It is interesting that both these proposals involved disused railways, for these were later to receive considerable attention following the mass closures of the 1960s. It is also significant that the second proposal would have been a link route for the Pennine Way. Although short loop routes were to be adopted (mainly as bad weather alternatives to the main route), it is clear from the Commission's discussions that long-distance routes were being considered as units in themselves, at least in their first stage of development. The concept of networks of routes was not taken up.

The Commission published a map of possible routes in 1953<sup>1</sup> and, in fact, this could be interpreted as showing a network of paths in the south of England. However, this map was based on the Hobhouse recommendations which, as has been seen, can be traced directly to the suggestions made by Tom Stephenson to the Southern Area of the Ramblers Association. The proliferation of routes in the south is more to do with the presence of chalk ridges, envisaged by Stephenson as being ideal for long-distance paths, than any plan to make linking networks, while the fact that the suggestion was made to the Southern Area of the Ramblers Association may further explain the regional discrepancy.

Many of the routes on this map were actively considered by the Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee during the first years of the Commission and the enthusiastic start to the programme can be gauged from an announcement made by Tom Stephenson, reported in the Times at the end of 1950 when the Commission was just one year old. He referred to on-going surveys of routes apart from the Pennine Way, which included the Thames Towpath (Teddington to Cricklade); a Chiltern Route (extending from the Gogmagog Hills in Cambridgeshire along the Ridgeway to the Thames at Goring, thence by the Berkshire

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Third Report (1953); see Map 1.

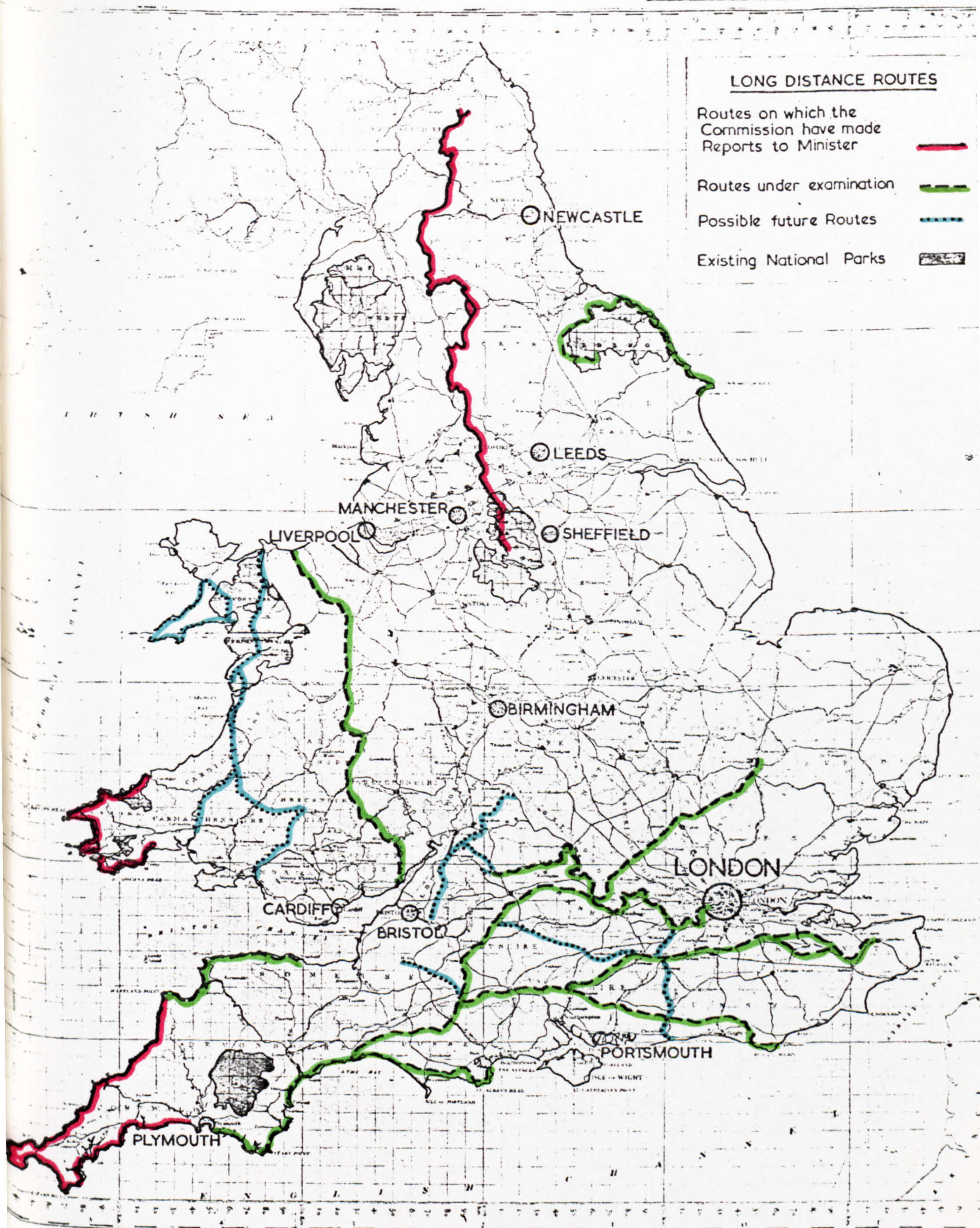


# **TEXT BOUND INTO THE SPINE**



## Long-Distance Routes in England and Wales

1953 PROPOSALS





Downs and the Vale of the White Horse to Avebury and through Wiltshire and Dorset to the coast at Seaton); the Pilgrims Way a route from Eastbourne along the South Downs to Winchester, linking with the Chiltern route; and Offa's Dyke (through the Welsh Marches to Chepstow). Paths around the Pembroke and the Cornish coasts were also being considered.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The Thames Towpath

The possibility of creating a long distance route along the towpath of the River Thames had received some prominence during the passage of the 1949 Act. Indeed, an editorial in the Journal of the Commons Society said:

"An important and welcome event of the year [1949] was the formation of a scheme for the creation of a permanent right of way alongside the River Thames from Cricklade to Teddington, for the most part along the existing towpath."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the idea can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century when a Select Committee of the House of Commons reported in 1884 on a 'River Thames Preserve', recommending that the 136 mile (219 km) towpath be available to the general public.

The Thames Conservancy had called a conference in 1949 which had been attended by representatives of 38 local authorities, the Crown Commissioners, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, the Commons Society and the Thames Board. The conference pressed for a stretch of 25 feet (10 m) alongside the towpath to remain undeveloped (the only instance in Great Britain of the idea of a protective corridor along a footpath). This was despite the fact that the Chief Engineer of the Conservancy had estimated that the minimum cost of the project would be £50,000 per annum.<sup>3</sup> Support for the project continued with the Joint Committee of the Commons Society and the Ramblers Association submitting a memorandum to the Conservancy commending the scheme, and the idea was given prominence in the Journal of the Commons

<sup>1</sup> The Times 29th December 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol IX, 1950, p122.

<sup>3</sup> Out of Doors vol 10 1949, pp246-251, 'The Thames Way' by Norman Roberts.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see vol IX, 1950, pp96-100, 'The Thames Towpath: A New Riverside Walk' by W.H.Williams. (footnote from overleaf)



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Society. A River Walk Committee was established to promote the idea and the National Parks Commission examined the proposal from the beginning of 1950.

Nevertheless, in September 1950 the minute of the Commission recorded that:

"Tom Stephenson said his Committee were not fully convinced that there was a sufficiently large public demand for a continuous riverside walk on the lines proposed by the Thames Conservancy to justify the very considerable expenditure."<sup>1</sup>

According to Stephenson, the recommendation of the Committee not to proceed with the Thames Towpath idea was criticised by Hugh Dalton who complained that it ought to be the Minister who decided on the merits of potential schemes for long-distance routes.<sup>2</sup> The Commission did feel it may have been possible to modify the proposal and a "systematic survey" of the towpath was carried out by volunteers, with technical and financial information being provided by the Ministry. This confirmed the estimate that £50,000 would be needed each year for ten years and the Commission rejected the idea in mid-1952, mainly because of the cost "in today's economic circumstances"<sup>3</sup> Five years later Pauline Dower reiterated the arguments against making the Thames Towpath a long-distance route, adding that:

"Such a path would in any case remain essentially a collection of short, locally-used paths, that an attempt to call it a Long-Distance Route might be a mistake."<sup>4</sup>

There was disappointment at the decision not to proceed with the Towpath. The Commons Society, noting its special interest in the scheme, felt there had been a misunderstanding as to what expenditure was necessary and it promised to continue to press for the scheme<sup>5</sup> which it did periodically into the 1960s. In the House of Commons the Towpath was referred to twice in 1952 and again in 1956 - and also in 1973 during an adjournment debate on 'Countryside Routes'. In this, Carol Johnson referred to the River Thames Society having had

<sup>4</sup> see overleaf p177.

<sup>1</sup> NPC Minute 50/7, 12th September 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

<sup>3</sup> NPC/M/51/7, 8th July 1952. <sup>4</sup> LDR/G/90, 2nd March 1957.

<sup>5</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol XI, 1953, p4.

a renewed proposal for the route rejected by the Countryside Commission in October 1972. The Commission had conceded that such a route was attractive but had again felt that it was too expensive. During the debate, Eldon Griffiths for the Government, referred to the problems of erosion, bridges and difficult negotiations (through Windsor for example) making the cost of the route "disproportionately high in relation to its scenic quality".<sup>1</sup>

In addition, in the House of Lords in 1953 the Earl of Lucan had entered into the debate, complaining that the Thames Conservancy had a statutory obligation to look to the upkeep of the towpath which it had "shamefully neglected". He felt that the official enthusiasm for the project had lessened since 1950, adding:

"One has the suspicion that all those concerned thought a fairy godmother would suddenly appear when the National Parks Commission was set up and would solve all their financial problems."<sup>2</sup>

### (c) The Pembroke Coast

The emphasis placed on access to the coast and on coastal footpaths through the 1930s and 1940s has already been discussed. Although originally envisaged as being in a different category to the routes like the Pennine Way (being dealt with separately in the Report of the Hobhouse Special Committee, for example), the 1949 Act had combined coastal paths and cross-country paths as long-distance routes, and so the Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee of the National Parks Commission had coastal routes to consider as well.

A difficulty that emerged early in the programme was that, although volunteers were readily available to work on the surveys of the cross-country paths, they were seldom available to survey the coast routes which had been proposed, mainly because of their

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1972-72 vol 860 col 1122, 20th July 1973. (See also Chapter 10).

<sup>2</sup> HL Reports 1952-53 vol 182 col 617, 17th May 1953.

inaccessibility. However, in the case of the Pembroke Coast, one of the members of the Subcommittee, Lord Merthyr, who had his estate in the area, undertook to explore possibilities with the local authorities.<sup>1</sup> In September 1950, Lord Merthyr announced that a local author, R.M. Lockley, had been approached about making a survey of the path and it was agreed that he could be paid expenses.<sup>2</sup> Twelve months later it was reported that formal consultations with the local authorities involved were beginning<sup>3</sup> and in February 1953 a draft report was presented to the Commission.<sup>4</sup>

The Report submitted a month later to the Minister<sup>5</sup> suggested paths "which would be most attractive to walkers" while following the coastline as closely as possible and avoiding metalled roads. These were obviously the main criteria which had been used in selecting a line for the route although reference was also made to keeping potential interference with agriculture to a minimum. Another hint at the criteria implicit in the selection of the route is found in the sentence:

"The path affords opportunities for extensive journeys along the wild cliffs and sandy dunes of this area, enriched by bird and animal life and historical associations."

The official route, was in fact, not continuous because, where the route went through the towns along the coast, no specific way had been specified and indeed the report referred to the possibility of crossing towns by bus. However, it would create a continuous right of way and thus allow continuous journeys to be taken on foot from one end to the other. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect a distinction still being made between the two types of path for, unlike the Pennine Way, the possibilities afforded for sampling this coastal route seem to have been more important to the Commission than the creating of a route to be walked from end to end.

1 NPC Minute 50/2, March 1950. 2 NPC Minute 50/7, 12th September 1950.  
3 NPC/M/51/8, 11th September 1951 4 NPC/M/53/2 10th February 1953 (& NPC/G/  
5 NPC Report to the Minister The Pembrokeshire Coast Footpath 113)  
March 1953.



The path was to be about 167 miles (269 km) in length and needed 66 miles (106 km) of new rights of way. Difficulties in the planning of the route had included the occupation of sections of the coast by the Services and four detours away from the coastline were necessary. This was despite the fact that almost all the route lay within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park which was designated in 1952. Only one county council and eight other local authorities were involved. Some modifications had been made following their recommendations during the statutory consultations, including one which avoided the need to revive a disused ferry. In fact, even with all the numerous indentations along the Pembrokeshire coastline, no recommendations were made for ferries and similarly no provisions were made for accommodation, meals or refreshments. Nonetheless, concern at the lack of facilities along parts of the route was expressed in the report, which promised "Consideration will be given to the best means of remedying this." Once again, getting the route established on the ground was made the first priority.

As with the Pennine Way, the report stressed that the impact of the route should be minimal and it was noted that the Commission was not in favour of surface treatment of the route. The report continued:

"There will, however, be some places where some work will be needed to be carried out, for example, the cutting back of undergrowth, the putting down of stones across streams, the cutting into slopes or the making of steps."<sup>1</sup>

Instead of frequent signposting, the removal of a short distance of turf to indicate the direction of the path was recommended.

The cost of the proposal was estimated at £10,350, with the creation of new rights of way accounting for half of this. The annual

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

maintenance cost was estimated at £450.

The report was submitted to the Minister in March 1953 and was approved by him less than four months later, on 3rd July 1953.

Although no major problems were to emerge with the path in its early years, the slow rate of progress in creating the route soon began to cause disappointment. The Commission's Fifth Annual Report (1954) expressed concern that no rights of way had yet been acquired, despite the fact that the county council had offered its assistance to the district councils involved.<sup>1</sup> In the following year, 19 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles (31 km) of the 60 miles (96 km) needed were acquired<sup>2</sup> but in the House of Commons in June 1956 the Government announced that the mileage needed had risen to 64 miles (103 km) of which almost 30 miles (48 km) had been acquired.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, this progress caused considerable disappointment not least for the Commission.

(d) The South-West Peninsula Coast Path

As well as the Pembrokeshire path, the other coastal path to attract attention in official reports in the 1940s was the old coastguards' path along the South-West Peninsula. In September 1950 a memorandum from Francis Ritchie to the Commission indicated that, because no volunteer help was available to survey the Cornish coast, the County Council had undertaken to do the preparatory work.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Commission's Second Annual Report noted that the Devon, Somerset and Dorset County Councils were also undertaking surveys of their coastlines for the Commission.<sup>5</sup>

The Commission decided to make proposals for the Peninsula Path in sections based on the counties and the one for the North Cornwall section was ready first. In fact, the County Council had worked remarkably quickly, enabling the statutory consultations to take place

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fifth Report (1954), p16.    <sup>2</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955), p16.

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1955-56 vol 554 col 243, 12th June 1956.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Minute 50/7, 12th September 1950.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Second Report (1951), p4.

in September 1951, and a draft report was presented by the Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee to the Commission by the end of the year.<sup>1</sup> The Third Annual Report of the Commission recorded that:

"The character and setting of a Cornish Coastal Path are in such marked contrast to the Pennine Way that it seemed in our view a most suitable choice for our next submission to the Minister."<sup>2</sup>

The Report on the 135 mile (217 km) North Cornwall Coastal Path was presented to the Minister in January 1952 and approved in April of the same year. It involved the creation of some 45 miles (72 km) of new rights of way but, once again, the Commission's Annual Report the following year could record no new acquisitions.<sup>3</sup>

By then (in July 1953) a report had been submitted on the Cornwall South Coastal Path and, although the Commission's Report up to the end of September 1954 could record only one mile of right of way having been acquired anywhere on the Cornish coast,<sup>4</sup> the Commission was encouraged that following the Minister's approval of the southern route the Ministry had taken the initiative of convening a meeting of local authorities to explain their responsibilities and the procedures involved in creating new paths.

Nonetheless, the Commission reported "little progress" in 1955, while in addition complications were arising along the section of the Peninsula Path in South Devon and elsewhere. A main problem was the extent to which development had taken place, particularly with gardens extending to the cliff edge. Although the County Council's planning department was involving itself in preliminary consultations with landowners along the Devon section<sup>5</sup> the Commissioners gradually found themselves having to make site visits to problem spots along the Peninsula Path. In addition, complications were arising concerning

<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/51/11, 11th December 1952.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Fourth Report (1953), p7.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955), p15.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Third Report (1952), p6.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Fifth Report (1954), p13.



costs, for in a number of instances the Valuation Officer proposed changes to the route to reduce the amount of compensation which would need to be paid. In fact, in most cases the Commission was able to accept the recommendations (resulting in a saving of some £3,000).<sup>1</sup>

It was clear that the South West Peninsula Path was to follow the pattern and be much slower in implementation than had been expected, despite the considerable involvement of the county councils and the initiative of the Ministry.

(e) Offa's Dyke

While the Pennine Way and the coastal paths were special cases, because of the long-standing pressure for them, progress planning other routes tended to depend on the enthusiasm of amenity groups promoting and surveying them, a position brought about by the Commission in its formally inviting amenity groups to take responsibility for the preliminary surveying of proposed routes.

Among the first survey reports was one on Offa's Dyke, the ancient boundary between Wales and Mercia, which had been recommended by the Hobhouse Special Committee. This was investigated by a group from three areas of the Ramblers Association on the invitation of the Commission. The volunteers were commended by the Commission for having "lavished their own leisure on the task"<sup>2</sup> and formal consultations were able to begin in 1953.

No fewer than 36 local authorities were involved in the consultations (including 19 rural district councils) and in addition the Inland Revenue Department involved itself at an early stage, proposing modifications to the line of the draft route to make savings. It was October 1954 by the time the Commission was able to submit its report to the Minister for this, the fifth long-distance route proposal.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/53/5&7, 12th May & 14th July 1953.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Third Report (1952), p7.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Offa's Dyke Path Report to the Minister, October 1954.

The report stressed (by underlining the relevant paragraph) that there were difficulties involved in planning a route to follow a historical feature. The Commission was of the opinion that the route should be designed primarily to meet the recreation needs and interests of the walker and therefore scenic quality and variety, natural history interest and existing facilities were considered as important as accurately tracing the line of the earthwork. Once again the desire to achieve harmony with the landscape was stressed and the points about sensitive waymarking and keeping interference with agriculture to a minimum were made. No ferries, accommodation or traffic restrictions were proposed and the cost of creating the route was estimated at £8,615, with over £5,000 of this to be used acquiring new rights of way. It was hoped that volunteer work, in constructing cairns, for example, would help keep costs down. By this time a standard annual sum of £5 per mile had been set for maintenance, resulting in a budget of £840 for Offa's Dyke. The route was to be some 168 miles (270 km) in length and would require 45 miles (72 km) of new rights of way.

The Minister took twelve months to consider this report and he approved it in October 1955. However, it soon became apparent that there would be major problems with its implementation, partly because it traversed a great deal of agricultural land and partly because of the large number of local authorities involved.

(f) Other Proposals

In June 1951 the Ramblers Association submitted a preliminary report on a South Downs Path, extending from Beachy Head to Salisbury<sup>1</sup> and beyond to link with a route from the Chilterns to Devon, a route

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Third Report (1952), p7.

on which there had been long-standing interest. However, the Fifth Annual Report of the Commission recorded that in view of "expanding responsibilities" of its small staff it had to defer work on this route and on others on which there had been progress, including the North Devon and Dorset sections of the Peninsula Coast Path and the Chilterns/Ridgeway route.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, the report revealed that informal consultations were taking place with the County Councils of the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, concerning a proposal first made by the Regional Group of the YHA for a coastal path from Flamborough Head northwards. This had been agreed in principle as a long-distance route by the Commission in mid-1953<sup>2</sup> and was the first route to be examined in depth which had not been recommended by the Hobhouse Special Report. The counties had, in fact, proposed that this route be extended inland along the escarpment of the Cleveland Hills. However, the Commission's Annual Report warned that systematic work on this route would have to be deferred as would that on a proposal made by the Snowdonia National Park Joint Advisory Committee for a 'Saints Way'. This was to incorporate the Welsh Highland Railway line, considered separately in 1950, but this time the route as proposed was to extend from the National Park to St.Davids in Pembrokeshire. The Times carried an article on the idea in December 1953.<sup>3</sup>

The 6th Report of the Commission was more optimistic and was able to refer to developments in the planning of three of the potential routes. The Yorkshire counties were "likely to collaborate in the preparation of the survey" of the north-eastern route; informal consultations were taking place with the county councils about the feasibility of the Welsh route; and informal contact was being maintained with the local authorities along the line of the route

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fifth Report (1954), pl6.

<sup>2</sup> NPC/M/53/6, 9th June 1953.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 7th December 1953, p4f.



along the South Downs. These various consultations were to continue through the 1950s.

##### 5. CHANGES IN THE COMMISSION

In 1953 the Commission had expanded from eleven to fourteen members, but nevertheless four members were retired at the end of that year, having had their appointments renewed just once. They included J.V. Allen, Lord Merthyr and Tom Stephenson, three of the five members of the original Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee. In the case of Stephenson it seems that his retirement was pressed for by some of the senior civil servants in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. There was still some resentment from the Ministry that the Commission had been established in the first place, and Tom Stephenson, as a particularly enthusiastic and impatient member of the Commission, made enemies at the Ministry. He has recalled, for example, that T. H. Sheepshanks (originally with the Ministry of Health and, in 1953, Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) referred to him as "the nigger in the woodpile", while Stephenson had also upset<sup>1</sup> Sir Patrick Duff, the Chairman of the Commission. Ironically, Duff was replaced at the beginning of 1954 and his successor, Lord Strang, twice tried to get Stephenson reappointed to the Commission, maintaining that Stephenson's knowledge and experience were<sup>2</sup> invaluable. However, he failed because of objections from the Ministry. Stephenson, of course, had no allies within the now-Conservative Government.

Stephenson referred to the Commission and its staff as a "bunch of amateurs" at a meeting in Kingsway Hall in 1954, and other early Commissioners confirm that there was little expertise in the National Parks Commission. Duff and the first Secretary were considered to be ill-suited to their jobs, while the staff were seconded from the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Francis Ritchie, May 1979 (Strang apparently stated this publicly at a Ramblers Association meeting in 1968).

Ministry and tended to have little interest or knowledge in the subject matter with which they were dealing.<sup>1</sup> A lot depended on the knowledge and enthusiasm of the Commissioners themselves and Stephenson had been particularly knowledgeable about virtually all the areas and the topics covered by the Commission.

As far as long-distance routes were concerned, Stephenson had continued to be the driving force behind the idea and had been largely responsible for the Commission's enthusiastic start in its programme of developing routes for, as the Commons Society put it, "he has made this subject particularly his own."<sup>2</sup>

However, after Stephenson's departure, he continued to assist the Commission (his continuing help was acknowledged in the 5th Annual Report) and his position as Secretary of the Ramblers Association kept him closely involved with its activities. Moreover, Francis Ritchie and Pauline Dower, both of whom had supported the idea of long-distance routes, remained Commissioners, being joined by Brunsdon Yapp, who became involved with several routes. Nevertheless, Stephenson's removal from the Commission was a great loss and was a particular blow to the programme for the development of long-distance routes.

## 6. THE COMMISSION'S RESPONSE TO EXPERIENCE

Shortly after the changes were made in the composition of the Commission a major review of the programme for long-distance routes took place. At Duff's last meeting as Chairman he referred to the "complex and meticulous subject" and noted his concern over the congestion in the programme, which he admitted, according to the minute, was "entirely his own fault for having encouraged, some years ago, the survey of them all simultaneously"<sup>3</sup>. He therefore reconstituted the Long-Distance Routes Subcommittee, which had been

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with Stephenson and Ritchie, confirmed in interview with Brunsdon Yapp, May 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol IX, 1950, pl63.

<sup>3</sup> NPC/M/54/2, 16th February 1954 (item 528).



disbanded in 1952 (with paths being dealt with in the interim by Committee 'B', whose prime responsibility was in the south of the country). The Subcommittee was to be chaired by Francis Ritchie, and its five members included Mrs Dower and Brunsdon Yapp.

Its task was to review the programme and in particular to consider whether all routes should be considered simultaneously or whether an order of priority ought to be established. The Committee was to assess how much work was involved in each proposal and was to consider whether more "spade work" should be carried out by the Commission on routes prior to a report being made to the Minister. Duff referred to the "basic anomaly" of the Act in which responsibility for approved routes rested with the Minister and the local authorities, "neither of whom have in any degree the first hand interest in the matter that we have."<sup>1</sup>

The following month the Committee presented its report, recommending that as an "economic working rule" just two routes should be prepared concurrently, with two more being considered at a lower level of priority.<sup>2</sup> It was decided that Offa's Dyke and the Devon South Coast Path be the priorities, with the North Devon and Somerset Coast Path and the Dorset Coastal Path in reserve. This pattern was to dictate the subsequent programmes for long-distance routes followed by both the National Parks and the Countryside Commissions, and in the mid-1950s it gave the impression of representing a considerable drop in interest in long-distance routes.

The Commission's second response to the problems being presented by the programme for long-distance routes in the mid-1950s was to discuss with the Ministry ways of improving the procedures for actually implementing the routes, once the Commission had reported on them. An observer from the Ministry was invited to attend the meeting

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> NPC/M/54/3, 16th March 1954.

of the Commission held in April 1954 (when waymarking seems to have dominated the discussion) and at the end of the year a serious attempt was made to work with the Ministry to speed up the procedure, with Francis Ritchie meeting a Mrs. Youard from the Ministry.

In fact, that meeting, reported to the Commission in December<sup>1</sup>, was not very satisfactory from the Commission's point of view for, although the representative from the Ministry stressed that it was the desire of the Ministry to see early completion of the routes, there was resistance to putting pressure on the local authorities. The assertion of the Government that the Pennine Way was already walkable and therefore that the situation was satisfactory was repeated at the meeting, with the representative saying that there was little point in putting pressure on local authorities when there was this de facto access. Ritchie put a number of counter arguments to this and the Commission concurred that "this procedure offered no satisfactory easement of the position" a point formally conveyed to the Ministry.

The Commission tried to stimulate the Ministry into taking some action of its own the following year. In April 1955 Lord Strang met Dame Evelyn Sharp, then Deputy Secretary of the Ministry. In the memorandum<sup>2</sup> that preceded the meeting the Commission spelt out its interpretation of the problems and noted that in nearly four years less than 50 miles (80 km) of new path had been created, "a position that can hardly be regarded as either creditable or satisfactory". Although it did stress that criticism of the Ministry was not intended, the memorandum did make the point that while no direct obligations were placed on anyone to carry out the proposals for long-distance routes under the 1949 Act, nevertheless the Minister had an implied obligation through his powers of default contained in Section 105(1)(b) and by his powers of direction contained in Section 41(3).

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1 LDR/M/9-44(a), 14th December 1954.

2 LDR/G/33, April 1953.



It suggested that a major reason for delay was the inadequacy of staff among the district councils charged with the implementation of the routes:

"The problem itself is one which inevitably involves a great deal of irksome work. The owners have to be found, formal documents have to be drawn up, and when these difficulties arise, it is not surprising that the local official puts the problem into a pigeon hole."<sup>1</sup>

The first suggestion made by the Commission was that the Minister should allow some of the county councils to take over from the district councils the duties of creating footpaths (although, presumably because of the advanced state of implementation, it was suggested that the Pennine Way be completed by the district councils). The second suggestion took up the point that whoever did the work the Act made no provision for grant-aiding to defer the cost of administration and the recommendation was made that a solicitor be used to work with the local authorities to ease both this and the limitations of staffing experienced by some of the districts. The Ministry was asked to either lend such a person itself or else to authorise the Commission to employ such a person to second to the authorities.

The memorandum added, rather desperately:

"The Commission, as had been mentioned above, have no express powers so to act, but surely something can be devised to get rid of the problem."

The Commission was adamant that, at the very least, some person be employed to visit the local authorities prior to a report being submitted to the Minister:

"The Commission are determined that before submitting further proposals for Long-Distance Routes, they will do their utmost to minimise the number of outstanding problems."<sup>2</sup>

The outcome of this meeting was a compromise. The Ministry agreed to a retired civil servant, Sir Geoffrey Stuart-King, working part-

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.      <sup>2</sup> ibid.

time for the Commission to visit local authorities involved in approved and potential routes. This was recognised as not being the ideal solution, but it did represent a gesture by the Ministry and it was hoped that this and the concentration of the Commission's programme to try to minimise problems would help long-distance routes to be implemented at a much faster rate in the future.

#### 7. CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST PART OF THE COMMISSION'S LIFE

By the mid-1950s, the end of the period recognised as the Early Years of the Commission, it was the problems confronting the development of long-distance routes which were pre-eminent. However, the National Parks Commission could point to considerable success so far as its part in the development of routes was concerned - the planning and reporting phases. It had planned, carried out the necessary consultations and produced reports for the Minister on the Pennine Way in 1951, the North Cornwall Coast Path the following year, the Pembroke Coast Path and the South Cornwall Coast Path in 1953 and Offa's Dyke in 1954, which represented 853 miles (1373 km) of pathway, all of which had been approved by the end of 1955. In addition a considerable amount of work had been done on a number of other potential routes in the Commission's first six years, including the other routes recommended in the Hobhouse Special Report.

Moreover, it had worked with various amenity groups, which had proved themselves willing and able to help by carrying out surveys, by offering local authorities their assistance in the implementation of routes, and by carrying out waymarking, for example. The county councils had generally proved amenable to the Commission's proposals, with several of them taking a leading role in the planning and surveying stages, while most of the district councils had cooperated



with the Commission, many of them making helpful observations and suggestions during the statutory consultations.

Long-distance routes continued to attract publicity and remained a popular idea which had caught the imagination of the public. There was support for their creation from most of the amenity groups and from other quarters. Within Parliament, for example, no fewer than seventeen questions concerning long-distance routes were asked in the House of Commons between 1950 and 1955, while routes were discussed in two debates in the Commons and one in the House of Lords in the same period.

Under the stewardship of the Commission no major changes were made in the concept of long-distance routes and it proceeded with developing the routes as they had been envisaged by the Hobhouse Special Committee. Because of the sizeable 'reservoir' of potential routes in the Committee's report plus others suggested periodically by outside groups, no thought seems to have been given to searching for new lines for routes. Little analysis seems to have been made of what constituted a long-distance route, although as the idea became translated into reality the Commission did make decisions which moulded the character of routes. In all this, the importance of Tom Stephenson in the continuity has been clearly seen.

Although the criteria for designing routes were never stated, a number can be implied from the Commission's reports and minutes. Routes were to be primarily for walkers, linking places of scenic and historic interest. A varied experience for the walker mattered more than, for example, routes striving to follow accurately historic features, ridges or the coastline. 'Quality', an undefined term, was considered important, as witnessed by the reasons for the rejection of the Welsh Highland Railway, the Northumbrian Pennine Way link-route,

and the Thames Towpath. The Commission went out of its way to stress that routes should have minimal impact on the countryside through which they passed from the point of view of both disturbance to agriculture and other land uses and environmental impact, with, for example, surfacing improvements and waymarking kept to a minimum. In practice, through this was never actually stated, existing pathways were used wherever possible, something which came to be the pattern with all British routes.

Perhaps because of the financial restrictions of the early 1950s the consideration of cost was prominent and the approved routes were to be low budget facilities. This was the major factor in the rejection of the Thames Towpath and it also affected the detailed planning of approved routes, as illustrated by the avoidance of the need to reopen a ferry on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path and the changes made to other routes at the instigation of the District Valuers in order to reduce the amount of compensation it would be necessary to pay.

Other important developments in the idea of long-distance routes in Great Britain which were implicit included the emphasis on footways, rather than bridlepaths, partly because of the lack of expressed demand for the latter and partly because of the continuing dominance of the hikers' lobby and the Ramblers Association in particular; the rejection of the concept of networks of routes was important and importance was placed on routes standing as units on their own. The rejection of the idea of making the line of the Welsh Highland Railway a long-distance route confirmed the importance of the length of a potential route, for they were planned primarily to allow several days walking. However, in the context of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path it has been suggested that a distinction continued to be made between the



cross-country routes, such as the Pennine Way, and coastal paths, with sampling and short distance walking being recognised as particularly important uses of the latter. Nonetheless, the coastal routes were designed to establish continuous rights of way and the later references to the Thames Towpath as being essentially a collection of local walks confirms the importance of the basic criterion that routes should be primarily for long-distance walking.

Some importance seems to have been attached to the creation of a variety of routes for although the Pennine Way was explicitly for experienced walkers (a point frequently put forward by the Commission during the debates on the line of the route over Kinder Scout) the Cornwall Coast Path was welcomed by the Commission as its second route to be taken to the reporting stage because of its contrast with the Pennine Way.

Finally, the Commission made a decision to put emphasis in the first instance on creating the rights of way necessary to complete the routes, rather than on the development of facilities, such as accommodation. Indeed, during this period the Commission did not use the options which had been inserted during the passage through Parliament of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill, that it include recommendations in its reports for the provision of ferries, accommodation and places providing meals and refreshment along the routes. Although there is no explanation as to why the Commission undertook this policy (apart from the financial constraints) it did become clear that it had been wise to phase development of routes given the delays in implementing them.

The main part of the Commission's statutory responsibility was over when it submitted a report to the Minister and, as has been seen, this part of the programme was undoubtedly successful. Had Stephenson's

prediction in 1950 come about, that the Minister would create long-distance routes by making a footpath order to cover the parts of the route which were not existing rights of way, far fewer problems would have transpired. However, this was not to be and the return of the Conservative Government in 1951 reduced the relative importance of the Commission; for there is evidence that Ministers favoured local authorities and other agencies at the expense of the Commission.

It soon became clear that problems would arise once routes had been approved and the implementation phase begun and, following Tom Stephenson's assertion that the implementation of routes should be a concern of the Commission, it became increasingly involved in extra-statutory work on routes.

The initial problems concerning the Pennine Way illustrate the unforeseen and time-consuming delays to which long-distance routes became prone. In one instance amenity groups caused major delays but it was frequently opposition from water undertakings which caused other problems. There is evidence that sporting interests may have allied with the water authorities in opposing parts of the route but generally the landowning and farming interests did not organise themselves against the development of long-distance routes at this stage. The provision for making alternative routes and loop routes proved very useful, not only for providing bad-weather alternative paths but also for reaching a compromise in some of the disputes, as in the case of Kinder Scout, where both the Commission and its opponents were able to save face by the adoption of alternative routes over the moor.

Waymarking was one aspect of the development of routes where the Commission took an assertive and leading role, although this subject attracted considerable attention and correspondence in the media, for



example, revealed very varied opinions. The Commission stressed from the beginning that routes should involve little in the way of improvements and that simple cairns on the upland stretches and distinctive signposting in the lowland sections was all that was needed. It did become clear as routes began to be walked that some sort of supplementary waymarking would be required, on gates and across farmland, for example. Generally, however, the Commission's policy proved itself and was a successful element in the development of routes of the character envisaged by the Commission.

The main problem with the implementation of routes was outside the control of the Commission. It was to apply to all routes and was the extremely slow rate at which new rights of way were negotiated. Implementation was the responsibility of the local authorities, usually the district councils. However, it was the Ministry that was blamed by Stephenson and others for the lack of progress, for had the Minister acted more forcefully and used his powers of default it could be argued that long-distance routes (and new rights of way in general) would have been created very much faster. While others blamed the inadequacy of the legislation, the fact remains that powers given in the Act were not used and there was great reluctance to use orders, as opposed to agreements, to create the new paths. To make the matter worse, so far as the amenity groups which were pressing for the completion of long-distance routes were concerned, the Ministry increasingly indicated satisfaction that routes were walkable, even if some rights of way were still not negotiated, a fact hotly disputed by the amenity groups.

The slow rate of progress can be traced to the inadequacies of some of the district councils. In some cases, clerks of rural district councils were part-time employees, with no desire to become involved

in negotiating new rights of way for a national long-distance route. Many officials seem to have had no knowledge of the procedures involved in creating new rights of way. The first regulations of the 1949 Act came into operation in July 1950<sup>1</sup> and several circulars were issued by the Minister.<sup>2</sup> However, these dealt mainly with the surveys of access areas and rights of way, which were the responsibility of the county and not the district councils, and even those parts relating to the creation of new rights of way were likely to be ignored by many of the officials of districts as not being applicable to them. The same would have applied to the explanatory memorandum<sup>3</sup> on grants available under the Act, which was issued in April 1954. This allowed expenditure to be made on approved long-distance routes without the consent of the Minister, but there were major exceptions, such as the provision of accommodation and other services, individual works over £100 and repair and maintenance expenditure which would exceed an average of £5 a mile within a financial year. In addition, compensation for footpath agreements or orders had not to exceed £5 unless a certificate was issued by the District Valuer.

It soon became clear that a considerable amount of time-consuming paperwork and negotiations which were not supported by the Exchequer was involved in the creation and maintenance of new paths. This was a disincentive, but also in some cases councils were not sympathetic to the idea of long-distance routes being created across their district (contrary to the expectation expressed during the passage of the Bill), especially where landowners who may be affected by the schemes were influential. There is evidence that some districts

<sup>1</sup> Hutchins op.cit. pp330-341.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 81, 84 & 91 in 1950, see Hutchins op.cit. pp342-7 and Town and Country Planning Circulars 53/52, 20/53 and 65/54.

<sup>3</sup> National Parks and Access to the Countryside (Grants) Regulations 1954 Explanatory Memorandum, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1954.



deliberately ignored their responsibilities and that letters from the Commission and even from the Ministry were ignored.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the period the Commission made a determined effort to speed up the implementation of the long-distance routes it had planned, firstly by limiting its own programme of planning for new routes, in order to allow it to anticipate and deal with as many problems as possible prior to reporting, and secondly by urging the Ministry to do more, by making available to local authorities (either directly or through the Commission itself) specialist staff to assist with negotiations.

This bold reform of its programme and particularly its decision to limit the number of new routes being examined superficially represented a reduction in interest in long-distance routes. However, in practice it represented an increase in intensity of the Commission's involvement, including more extra-statutory activities.

This coincided with changes in the Commission in which Tom Stephenson was retired. As has been seen, he had been particularly influential in many of the Commission's activities, with the nature of the early Commission giving him considerable scope to become directly involved. He had continued his interest in long-distance paths, and had continued to play a prominent part in the moulding of the idea of such routes, taking it now into the stage of implementation. He had assured their continuing prominence but, with his removal from the Commission, the next stage of the life of the National Park Commission would see long-distance routes without their traditional champion.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Brunsdon Yapp, May 1979.

Considerable progress could be seen in the transition of the idea of long-distance routes to a reality. However, the fact remained that none were yet completed, and it was problems and delays that now seemed to dominate the programme as the National Parks Commission - without Tom Stephenson to ensure that prominence was given to long-distance routes - entered the Middle Years of its life.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MIDDLE YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION - THE COMMISSION

In the middle of the decade the Commission found itself beset by numerous problems many of which had not been envisaged in the immediate post-war period when the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill was being prepared. Among these were the unprecedented pressures being put on the countryside by new developments in technology - in nuclear power, transmission of electricity and transport, for instance. These all revealed themselves to be major threats to the countryside as the 1950s progressed, as did changes in land use, such as afforestation, the ploughing of downland, the development of deep-water ports and mining. In addition, demands on the countryside for recreation were increasing, with attendant problems of litter, vandalism and caravans, for example, and with the inevitable reaction of the landowners - the restriction of access. The Commission soon became overloaded with problems of development on top of its other responsibilities, for national parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and long-distance routes.

It responded bravely to these problems as they increased through the decade, although the difficulties it faced were daunting. In its Third Annual Report it had echoed one of the main principles behind the establishment of national parks - to ensure that they pass<sup>1</sup> "inviolate" to future generations. However, in a number of well-publicised cases it failed dramatically in this and often felt it was not getting the support it should from the Government. The coming of the Conservative Party to power in 1951 had resulted in marked changes

1 NPC Third Report (1952) pl2.

in attitudes to national parks, with the Government clearly favouring county councils to the Commission in some instances, such as in the creation of joint advisory committees instead of the more powerful and effective joint planning boards where a number of counties covered a national park - even to the extent of overturning Dalton's decision that a board be established in the case of Snowdonia National Park.

As had been predicted during the passage of the Bill, finances were proving the major problem. As an extreme example, the publication of the Country Code had to be delayed because the Commission could not afford the £350 to have it printed.<sup>1</sup> Projects in national parks had to be delayed or abandoned because of financial pressures although, while the Commission complained about the contrast between the 11/- (55 new pence) per person per annum spent on defence and the 1d (1/2 new penny) per person spent on national parks during the whole of the first ten years of its life,<sup>2</sup> two years later the Minister of Housing and Local Government was to remark: "It would be nice, you know, if you would give me a chance now and again to approve something other than a car park."<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that the Commission and the park authorities must take some of the blame for a lack of imagination and drive in financial matters.

By the mid-1950s other problems were becoming apparent which directly affected the Commission's programme for long-distance routes. These included the disappointing response by the county councils to the survey of access (a very large majority of the counties had decided no action was necessary) and the time being taken over the recording of rights of way. These affected the amenity groups, many of which were involved in the survey of footpaths, for example, and this and their concern over developments in the countryside fully occupied them. In fact, the importance of some of the groups waned during the

<sup>1</sup> NPC Second Report (1951) para 16.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Tenth Report (1959) para 62.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Twelfth Report (1961) pp75-6.



1950s, partly because the momentum had been lost in a somewhat misplaced feeling of euphoria after their goal had been achieved with the passage of the 1949 Act, and partly because the unique political position of the second half of the 1940s had gone, when people like Stephenson and Birkett were close to important politicians. Membership of the Youth Hostels Association and the Ramblers Association declined between 1950 and 1960.<sup>1</sup>

Even some of the successes of the 1949 Act proved to be limited, such as the scheme for countryside wardens which was very popular with landowners, but which would apply only where local authorities had an interest in the land such as where there were access agreements. In addition, enthusiasm waned in other quarters as the 1950s progressed such as in the national parks themselves, as John Barratt discovered in his examination of the minutes of the Pembroke Coast National Park.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that, after a very enthusiastic and successful start the Commission gradually got bogged down in these problems and the middle years of its work would seem to reveal relatively little progress. The programme for long-distance routes, with its own set of problems which became apparent as the 1950s progressed, exhibited the same pattern, although here the seeming reduction in involvement in long-distance routes represented a concerted effort to become involved in a wide range of extra-statutory activities, in an attempt to become more effective.

This chapter traces the development of long-distance routes through the period 1955 to 1961, the middle years of the National Parks Commission, and reviews how effective the new strategy was.

<sup>1</sup> YHA Annual Report 1975; Proceedings of the Countryside in 1970 Conference, Nature Conservancy, 1965, p234.

<sup>2</sup> Geographical Magazine January 1970, pp292-3.

## 2. THE COMMISSION'S APPROACH TO LONG-DISTANCE ROUTES

### (a) The New Strategy

As has been seen, the Commission's response to the problems besetting the programme of developing long-distance routes had been to review its role in the system and to change its strategy to become more fully involved in the development and the implementation of the routes, at the expense of the breadth of its programme.

The new policy to trim the programme in order to allow more preliminary work to be done on routes was made public in a reply in the House of Commons in March 1955. The questioner had expressed concern about the Commission's note of anxiety about the speed of creation of long-distance routes in its Fifth Annual Report. Duncan Sandys, for the Government, replied:

"The National Park Commission proposed to carry the preliminary survey of future routes to a further stage than has hitherto been possible. This may help to relieve local authorities, some of whom find negotiations of numerous agreements with owners of the land puts an undue burden on their limited staff. Although the making of orders may be quicker, it is preferable to proceed by agreement wherever possible, even if this should take a little longer."<sup>1</sup>

The Commission would also expect to continue its involvement with routes even after they had been approved, but the second major part of its strategy had been to try to get the Ministry more directly involved. It was felt that the Ministry had been rather complacent about the situation, illustrated by the assertion of Ministers that routes were walkable, even if they were not complete rights of way, and therefore the situation was satisfactory. The Commission worked to get the Ministry to agree to aid the local authorities in some more effective way. Lord Strang's meeting with Dame Evelyn Sharp in April 1955 had resulted in her recommending a retired civil servant, Sir Geoffrey Stuart King, to approach the local authorities on behalf of

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<sup>1</sup> HC Debates 1954-55, vol 537, col 245, 1st March 1955.



the Commission. This was recognised as being a compromise and far from the ideal, but it did represent a gesture from the Ministry and an acceptance that the Ministry ought to help speed up the creation of long-distance routes.

From the summer of 1955 to the summer of 1957 King travelled the country, meeting various officials from the local authorities along the lines of the routes, attempting to smooth out problems.

(b) Sir Geoffrey Stuart King's Work

King's first report to the Commission<sup>1</sup> concerned a visit to Cornwall and he raised some specific issues of local importance. He confirmed that the preparation of the statutory maps of rights of way was interfering with negotiations concerning the long-distance routes, with evidence that routes were being used in the bargaining between the County and some land-owners. In places he found that sections of the line of the routes were not well chosen and he recommended some detours away from the coast, across the necks of small headlands, for example, to improve the routes. King found little opposition to the idea of the development of the Coast Paths and only sporadic claims for compensation which, he noted, could be influenced by the wording of the individual letters sent by local officials to land-owners (for example, if the official introduced the idea of compensation for fencing there was more chance of a claim being made). He noted that where personal meetings with land-owners would often be the quickest and most satisfactory way of negotiating and dealing with problems, the district councils often sent letters because "travelling claims by junior officials are not popular". However, King felt that to take negotiations out of the hands of the district councils would lead to extra delays and might antagonise local land-owners.

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<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/55/8, 13th September 1955 (LDR/G/50).

These points illustrate the kind of difficulties emerging in the establishment of long-distance paths. There was a considerable variety of problems which could arise in the very large number of individual negotiations which had to be conducted and King's observations confirmed that as much preliminary work as possible should be done to smooth the way. He recommended that as many consultations as possible be undertaken by the Commission and that as much help and encouragement as possible be given to the local authorities. However, the Commission reluctantly recognised that delays were inherent in the process and would have to be accepted.

King made a "comprehensive series of visits" to the Cornish authorities in September 1955, and in the Spring of 1956 he visited some of the authorities along Offa's Dyke, dealing with a large number of problems. He commended some variations to the approved route which had been suggested by the local authorities, land-owners and the Ramblers Association. He met the officials from district councils in Pembrokeshire in the Autumn of 1956 and returned to the South West Peninsula Path in 1957, assisting in the formal consultations concerning the North Devon Coast Path as well as revisiting the Cornish authorities.

Nonetheless, the Commission's Annual Report in 1957<sup>1</sup> noted that, despite King's efforts, progress remained "disappointingly slow" and one must conclude that the extra meetings and consultations did not in themselves have the effect of significantly increasing the speed of creation of long-distance routes: what was done was too small a step in the right direction.

(c) Pauline Dower's Proposals

In March 1957 Pauline Dower, by then Deputy Chairman of the

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Eighth Report (1957) p14.



Commission, presented a long memorandum on long-distance routes in another attempt to improve the procedure for their creation. The paper began:

"Looking back, we should not feel too discouraged at the seemingly slow rate of work. We are creating a system of long-distance paths which will be a permanent asset to the countryside."<sup>1</sup>

It seemed that at last the inevitability of the slow rate of progress creating the paths was recognised by the Commission.

However, the purpose of the paper was to try again to find a procedure within the legislative constraints which would keep delays to a minimum. To this end the problems confronting the programme were isolated and Pauline Dower's list provides a useful summary of what were recognised as being the most important in the light of seven year's experience of the programme.

A major problem was recognised as being the sporadic appearance of the statutory maps defining existing rights of way ("Part IV maps") and the fact that they had been the responsibility of the county and parish councils rather than the district councils which were responsible for the negotiation of new rights of way. The second main problem was the nature of some of the district councils which were charged with the execution of the approved routes:

"Delay in individual cases has been due sometimes to the genuine difficulty a small-staffed District Council office finds in getting round to this extra work: sometimes, it must be admitted, delay has seemed due to apathy, or a lack of understanding of the processes applicable, on the part of the District Council clerk concerned."<sup>2</sup>

Other problems the paper noted included the difficulties in tracing land-owners and in dealing with estates in trust. Water catchment, safety and Service requirements had led to problems and objections made by land-owners had included trespass, dogs, the danger of fire and the reduction of an individual's privacy. Dower's conclusion seemed to be that personal visits by Commissioners or Commission staff

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<sup>1</sup> LDR/G/90, 2nd March 1957 draft, pl.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p2.

were the only way to avoid or alleviate problems, reaffirming the strategy which had developed towards the middle of the decade despite the lack of success recorded by Sir Geoffrey Stuart King.

However the paper proposed changes in the procedures and responsibilities for dealing with routes within the Commission. Apparently, it had been proposed that long-distance routes should again be examined by the Commission's Area Committees, rather than by the existing Long-Distance Routes Committee. The paper recommended that this idea be rejected, firstly because the area committees already had a considerable workload and secondly because:

"Long-distance routes are a specialised subject with complicated law behind it. It is a highly technical subject, having no essential connection with National Parks except that, by the provision of the 1949 Act, it is to be handled by the Commission."<sup>1</sup>

The paper recommended that the Long-Distance Routes Committee be retained, but that it be used only for policy decisions and to select routes. The day to day work should be done by the staff and field officers who would refer to the Deputy Chairman and 'Referees', Commissioners who had a specific geographic area of interest. Furthermore, Dower recommended that a small section or department headed by an estate agent should be set up to work on routes. Concerning the procedure, Dower stressed:

"Long-distance Routes are essentially routes for walkers. They should be chosen, therefore, in practice as well as by theory, by walking as well as by the studying of maps. Though outside bodies and individuals have helped much in suggesting routes, it would be preferable if the work [be] done by Commission Staff, who may be presumed to understand the view of the Commission as no outsider can."<sup>2</sup>

She went on to incorporate this into a ten-step procedure for the Commission in the creation of long-distance routes. Firstly, when a route was contemplated by the Long-Distance Routes Committee, the first thinking-out should be by a Commissioner who was an Area Referee

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p9.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. pp9-10.



in conjunction with the field staff and the Deputy Chairman, and should be based on the 'Part IV' Maps. Secondly, "Each route has a certain guiding 'characteristic'; it may be a coastal route, a ridgeway route or a route following some archaeological or natural feature." If such a route looked practical from maps the field officer should walk the entire route, making a schedule of where deviations were possible. (There is a note in this section that objections that it was tautological to join existing rights of way to make a long-distance route were invalid because of the special provisions applicable to official routes.)

Thirdly, the Referee or the Deputy Chairman should examine the field officer's report and, on his or her approval, the proposal would pass to the Long-Distance Routes Committee. Fourthly, the Committee would then examine and approve the plan, and fifthly, the field officer or Commissioner would visit each local authority to discuss the proposal. Sixthly, the field officer would carry out detailed consultations and field work in association with the district councils, and then, seventhly, on the advice of the districts, land-owners would be visited, although:

"It is probably wiser to consult only with those land-owners brought in by the District Councils. If the Commission begins independent consultations we might be called upon to consult with all the owners on any given route, running quite possibly into thousands."<sup>1</sup>

The paper stressed the importance of flexibility at this stage, which was considered important in negotiations. Nevertheless, the paper did make the point that if negotiations did fail, footpath creation orders could be used.

The eighth step was when a draft report was approved by the Committee. Problems should be highlighted in the report and it should be discussed with officials of the Ministry at this stage. Ninethly,

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p11.



a review of the proposal would be undertaken and, following its formal approval by the Commission, it would be submitted to the Minister. The final stage outlined by Pauline Dower was "after-care work", the extra-statutory involvement of the Commission during the implementation of routes.

The paper thus sought to formalise the increasingly complex stages in the Commission's involvement in the development of long-distance routes. It did not attempt to reduce the time or the staff commitment required of the Commission, and in fact increased them. It rejected the possibility of using volunteer groups to carry out the main field work, insisting that the Commission be fully involved in each stage, despite the successful use of volunteers in the first stages during the early years of the Commission's programme for long-distance routes. A further point of interest is that no mention was made of the need to consult groups other than local authorities, such as the land-owning groups, and there was to be only limited consultation with individual land-owners along the routes.

The discussion of the 'character' of routes, in the second stage, is significant, for this is the first time that this important point has been highlighted. However, there were still no criteria developed for the selection of new routes and no hint as to where it was envisaged new ideas would come from. Presumably the Hobhouse recommendations still dominated thinking, while those and the suggestions put forward by amenity groups and local authorities meant that there would be obvious choices for additions to what was going to remain a deliberately limited programme for a number of years ahead. There was no discussion of a strategy for selecting the order of routes to be examined.

The paper was approved by the Commission<sup>1</sup> although, according to<sup>2</sup> Brunsdon Yapp, no formal action was taken over the recommendations. Nevertheless, the procedure was gradually adopted and a separate long-distance routes section began to develop. The paper is of particular importance, not so much because it instigated dramatic change, but because it documented one of the first detailed reviews of the problem of long-distance routes and outlined the problems perceived by the Commission and the procedures which were in fact evolving following several years of practical experience of routes.

### 3. ATTEMPTS TO AMEND THE LEGISLATION

#### (a) Proposals in 1955 and 1956

It had rapidly become clear that the 1949 Act, as administered, had a number of serious defects and that changes were needed to help the Commission, national parks and, not least, long-distance routes. There was agitation from amenity groups and local authorities for reform and several moves were made to bring about changes during the middle part of the Commission's life.

In 1955, the Commission published in its Annual Report some tentative suggestions for points to be covered in a "tidying-up<sup>3</sup> bill". These included two relevant to long-distance paths: that administrative expenses be allowed to local authorities for creating rights of way for approved routes; and that wardens be allowed to operate, with the land-owner's agreement, even where the local authority had no interest in the land, a point which may have helped in negotiations for new rights of way.

In July 1955 Duncan Sandys, MacMillan's replacement as Minister of Housing and Local Government, invited the Commission to give him some

<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/57/4, 1st May 1957.      <sup>2</sup> Interview, May 1979.  
<sup>3</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955), p28.    <sup>4</sup> Cherry op.cit. p113.



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suggestions for amendments and the Commission therefore submitted a  
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revised list of recommendations. The submission was in the form of a  
nine-point programme and it emphasised the shortcomings of the  
financial provisions of the Act. It also reiterated the suggestions  
for long-distance routes, emphasising that because a long-distance  
route was a national facility it was "unjust" that local authorities  
were not assisted in their administrative responsibilities:

"The cost of negotiations, we are finding, can well be much  
greater than the cost of compensation of works or maintenance; yet  
so finite and specialised is long-distance route work as a whole  
that we believe that the total cost to the country would still be  
very small indeed even if the administrative costs of creating the  
routes was grant-aided." 3

The Commission's Annual Report the following year outlined similar  
suggestions for amending the legislation which had been made by the  
County Councils Association and the Park Planning Authorities in a  
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joint submission to the Minister and the amenity groups were pressing  
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for similar changes. However, mainly because most of the proposals  
involved spending more money, Sandys indicated that no legislation  
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could be possible before 1959 at the earliest.

(b) Blenkinsop's Bill

A bill was considered in 1959, but it was a Private Member's Bill  
and not a government measure. Arthur Blenkinsop, then President of  
the Ramblers Association, introduced his National Parks (Amendment)  
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Bill at the end of 1958. It was based on the Commission's proposals  
and was a modest measure, consisting of only three sections.  
Nonetheless, it did contain both the points from the Commission's  
submission which were relevant to long-distance routes, the provisions  
that wardens be allowed to operate on a wider basis and that local  
authorities be compensated for negotiating the rights of way necessary  
to complete long-distance routes.

2 NPC Seventh Report (1956) pp61-4. 3 ibid. p64.

4 NPC Eighth Report (1957), Appendix H.

5 See, for example, Ramblers Association Parks for the Nation n.d. (?1956)

6 Cherry op.cit. pp10-1.

7 HC Bills 1958-59, Bill 24, 12th November 1958.

1 Cherry op.cit. p113.



However, the main part of the Bill was concerned with finances, with Blenkinsop pressing for the National Land Fund to be used to assist in the development of national parks. The Government could not agree to this, although it was sympathetic to some of Blenkinsop's points,<sup>1</sup> and at the Bill's second reading at the end of January 1959 it was talked out, after the then Minister of Housing and Local Government, Henry Brooke, had declared that, because of its financial implications, it was unconstitutional as a Private Member's Bill.

(c) The House of Lords

In fact, in the middle years of the Commission's life little attention was paid to countryside matters inside Parliament. Blenkinsop's Bill was an obvious exception to this lack of interest, as were three debates in the House of Lords, all instigated by Lord Silkin, and each considering an annual report of the Commission. During the debates the weaknesses in the existing legislation were highlighted.

In 1957, Lord Silkin, introducing a debate on the Commission's Seventh Report, expressed concern over the provisions for, and progress with, the national parks. He then discussed long-distance routes:

"A great deal of interest has been aroused in these long-distance footpaths, whereby one can walk perhaps a hundred or more miles in complete isolation on difficult ground and really enjoy the beauty of the countryside."<sup>2</sup>

However, he was critical of the delay in implementing routes, continuing:

"Everyone is agreed on the principle of long-distance footpaths, and if only a little more 'ginger' were put into the operation I have no doubt it would be completed quickly..... I hope whoever is responsible for long-distance routes will bear in mind that they are intended not merely for athletes, and people of great vigour

<sup>1</sup> Cherry op.cit. pp118-120.

<sup>2</sup> HL Reports 1956-57 vol 202 col 655, 20th March 1957.

and energy, but for ordinary people who like walking, who enjoy a long walk, but who are not so young and agile as they used to be."<sup>1</sup>

The latter quotation is significant in that hitherto most attention had been on routes for the young, the sort suggested in the first passage, on the Pennine Way model. The second quotation suggested that a variety of high-quality routes, giving opportunities for a much wider public, was now an accepted objective.

In this debate, the Government spokesman had replied to the criticism by blaming the delays in the programme for long-distance routes on the slowness of the footpath survey and the compilation of definitive maps, which, he said, had been "badly underestimated."<sup>2</sup>

The debate on the Commission's Ninth Annual Report had but one<sup>3</sup> mention of long-distance paths, which is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that public attention to them had fallen to a low ebb during the latter years of the 1950s. The third debate, on the Commission's Tenth Report, brought the exasperated comment from Lord Silkin that the creation of long-distance routes seemed to be a "spare time<sup>4</sup> occupation with local authorities." Lord Dalton added:

"The reason for this very slow advance is simple: it is because there are no effective powers vested in the Commission for compulsory purchase, where necessary, of rights of way or rights of access at given points along the routes."<sup>5</sup>

#### (d) Proposals in 1961

The Twelfth Report of the Commission again raised the need for amending legislation and in it was published a memorandum sent to the<sup>6</sup> Minister suggesting points to be covered in a new bill. These included the previous points that administration ought to be grant aided when national facilities were being developed (although long-distance routes were not expressly included in this) and that wardens

<sup>1</sup> ibid.      <sup>2</sup> ibid. col 682.

<sup>3</sup> HL Reports 1958-59 col 217, 1st July 1969.

<sup>4</sup> HL Reports 1960-61 col 612, 19th April 1961.

<sup>5</sup> ibid.      <sup>6</sup> NPC Twelfth Report (1961), p78.

should be able to operate with fewer restrictions. However, this time two more important requests directly concerning long-distance paths were included, reflecting the points raised by Silkin and Dalton in the debate in 1961 and the current feeling that, no matter what incentives were given to some small local authorities, they seemed to have neither the ability nor the desire to carry out their roles without intolerable delays. The first point was that, because of the "inordinate delays" in creating the routes, the county councils and not the district councils should be responsible for creating the rights of way necessary to complete the routes and that it should be stated in the Act that it was a duty to do so. The second was that the general duties of the Commission in regard to national parks should be extended to long-distance routes to allow it to become formally involved in the negotiations during the creation of rights of way. This would have given legal status to the strategy the Commission had already adopted, to become more directly involved in all stages of the development of routes.

In fact, the Minister, Henry Brooke, was prepared to introduce legislation at this time<sup>1</sup> but problems regarding the responsibilities of the park authorities regarding finance combined with another economic crisis meant that this was postponed. In spite of strong lobbying from the Commission and elsewhere and, in fact, in spite of the Government's stated sympathy, the middle part of the Commission's life came to an end without any amending legislation having been passed.

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<sup>1</sup> Cherry op.cit. p121.



#### 4. PROGRESS WITH LONG-DISTANCE ROUTES

##### (a) The Pennine Way

In April 1955 a question was asked in the House of Commons inquiring when the Pennine Way would be open. The Government's reply was that this was unknown, but that only four miles (6 km) were still to be created and that 63 miles (101 km) had been acquired in three years.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this was untrue. The National Parks Commission's Annual Report for the year ending September 30th 1955 stated that while 12 miles (20 km) had been established that year, some 26 miles (42 km) were left without right of way.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence that the Government retracted its erroneous statement and there were to be no more Parliamentary questions on the Pennine Way until 1960.

The Commission's Annual Reports depicted slow progress with the route, with new problems arising virtually every year. In 1955 a major problem had occurred at the very start of the route, in Edale, where the landowners were objecting to the log bridge over Grindsbrook being used.<sup>3</sup> The recommendation was made that another bridge be used but this was not acceptable to the Peak Park Planning Board, which, by a direction under Section 41 (1) of the 1949 Act, had been authorised to act instead of Chapel-en-le-Frith Rural District Council in negotiating rights of way along the Pennine Way.<sup>4</sup> The Board suggested that a new bridge be constructed, but the Commission's Report for 1956 revealed that the Ministry had objected to this on the grounds of cost.<sup>5</sup>

However, this Report could show that eleven (18 km) of the 26 miles (42 km) of new rights of way needed to complete the Pennine Way had been acquired during the year (1956) and this progress continued, with a further 10 miles (16 km) being created the following year,

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1954-55 vol 540 col 43, 26th April 1958.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Sixth Report (1955) pl4. <sup>3</sup> ibid. ppl3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Rossiter op.cit. p275.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956) pl7.

including agreements with the remaining water authorities at the southern end of the route.<sup>1</sup> Just 5 miles (8 km) were thus outstanding, representing the short section at Edale and the Blakehope Fell section in Northumberland.

No progress could be reported in any of the following three years, although attempts were being made to devise a new line for the route in the Northumbrian section and Commissioners were being involved in meetings at Edale concerning the crossing of Grindsbrook.<sup>2</sup> The delay was causing difficulties with the guide book Tom Stephenson had been asked to write and, in fact, Stephenson himself had discovered a number of problems with the route while surveying the northern part of it, generally concerning route-finding and maintenance.<sup>3</sup>

Maintenance was to prove another major problem with routes, for the highway authorities often did not take their responsibilities for the maintenance of footpaths seriously, even when they were eligible for grant-aid. Stephenson outlined the problems he had recognised in a letter which was presented to the Commission, with Ritchie asking for immediate action to be taken on them.<sup>4</sup> The checking up on parts of routes which were supposedly complete represented yet another time-consuming activity for the Commission's staff.

Management problems were examined further in 1961, and a number of site visits were made. It was reported that Cumberland and Northumberland County Councils (as highway authorities) were working on the facilities needed (stiles, signs and waymarking, for example), while the Forestry Commission was alleviating some of the problems encountered in the Border Forest Park by waymarking the route. In addition, a further improvement was made to the route when, following the accidental drowning of hikers fording Maize Beck, a Varying Report was approved (under Section 55 of the Act) to reroute the Pennine Way

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1 NPC Eighth Report (1957), p13. 2 NPC Ninth Report (1958), pp15-6.  
3 NPC Eleventh Report (1960), p19. 4 NPC/M/60/6, 22nd June 1960.



to allow a safer crossing of the river. Accommodation was still recognised as being in short supply along sections of the route and this was becoming more serious as more walkers ventured onto the Way; but little progress was made with this during the period.

In 1961 the problem at Edale was at last resolved when the Peak Park Planning Board negotiated a right of way over the log bridge.<sup>1</sup> At the same time it acquired the Grindsbrook Meadows and the Board's Eleventh Report stated:

"This will safeguard the route of the Pennine Way through the meadows and will allow a degree of public access to the land, particularly by old people and family parties who cannot take their recreation on the higher moors of Kinder."<sup>2</sup>

This subsequently became the most eroded part of the Pennine Way and the wisdom of that management decision has been questioned.

There remained the problem in the northern part of the route. In fact the Commission's 13th Annual Report recorded that three Varying Reports had been made for the Pennine Way in Northumberland and one in Cumberland, following the discovery that sections of the route were not, as had been supposed, rights of way.<sup>3</sup> The major problem still to be resolved was the section of six miles (9 km) north of Bellingham. Pauline Dower in her paper to the Commission in 1957 had suggested that this problem was caused because just one land-owner was in dispute with the County Council, and that he had no fundamental objection of a right of way for the Pennine Way.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, no agreement could be reached, and in 1962 the Commission announced that "all possible solutions have now been fully explored". The decision was therefore made to submit a Varying Report to the Minister for a new line for the route.<sup>5</sup> This decision brought the Commission into conflict with the County Council and the Ramblers Association and this dispute was to bring considerable attention to the Pennine Way at the beginning of the final phase of the National Park Commission's

<sup>1</sup> NPC Twelfth Report (1961), p20.

<sup>2</sup> Peak Park Planning Board 11th Report 1962-63, p51.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), pp22-3.

<sup>4</sup> LDR/G/90 op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p22.



programme for long-distance routes.

(b) The Cornish Coast

The two parts of the Cornish Coast Path had been approved in 1952 and 1954, but by the end of 1955 little progress had been made on either. Of the 45 miles (72 km) of new rights of way which had been needed to complete the 135 mile (216 km) North Cornwall Coast Path, 35 miles (56 km) still remained, while on the 133 mile (215 km) South Coast Path,  $41\frac{1}{2}$  (69 km) out of the original 43 miles (70 km) still remained to be acquired. As has been noted, Sir Geoffrey Stuart King worked with the local authorities to attempt to speed up the creation of routes but he had little success. In fact, the publication of the definitive map of rights of way in 1956 revealed that rights of way did not exist in places where it had been supposed they did and so the Seventh Report of the Commission showed the outstanding length of the North Coast Path without rights of way had risen to 37 miles (58 km).<sup>1</sup>

By 1959 there had been progress and just five miles (8 km) remained to be secured in the north and 18 miles (29 km) in the south. However, problems had arisen with coastal erosion and the Commission was kept occupied making Varying Reports to maintain the continuity of the route.<sup>2</sup> In addition, other modifications were made to the line of the route during this middle period in response to pressures from land-owners, local authorities and users, and these proved time-consuming for the Commission.

(c) The Pembroke Coast

When the 167 mile (267 km) Pembroke Coast Path was approved in 1953, some 66 miles (106 km) of new rights of way had been required. By the end of 1955,  $19\frac{1}{2}$  miles (31 km) had been acquired and the answer to a Parliamentary question in mid-1956 revealed that about 30

<sup>1</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), p15.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Tenth Report (1959), p17.

miles (48 km) had been negotiated, representing relatively swift progress.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 1957 the first youth hostel to be created with financial aid from the Commission was opened on the Pembroke Coast Path at Pwll Deri.<sup>2</sup>

In the same year, Pauline Dower noted that the Clerk of Haverfordwest Rural District Council had already negotiated no fewer than 67 agreements, covering 28 miles (45 km) and was working on the remaining 57 properties in his area.<sup>3</sup> Then in 1958, Cemaer Rural District Council made one of the first public path orders to create a section where the land-owner had insisted on a fence being erected to protect his livestock from hikers' dogs.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, not all of the authorities were prepared to act decisively and 32 miles (51 km) of the Pembroke Coast Path still remained without rights of way at the end of 1959. In addition, problems were being caused by disruption of the path through erosion of the cliffs and about 1960 the beginnings of the development of the deep water harbours around Milford Haven with their associated industrial complexes brought special problems for the route.

#### (d) Offa's Dyke Path

On the approval of Offa's Dyke Path in 1955 some 45 miles (72 km) out of the total distance of 168 miles (269 km) needed new rights of way. Special problems had soon been recognised as being inevitable with this route, because no less than 36 local authorities were involved and much of the route was through agricultural land. Sir Geoffrey Stuart King concentrated on this route but in fact progress was to be very slow. Numerous Varying Reports were required and these took up a considerable amount of the Commission's time. It even proved necessary in some instances to vary the Varying Reports.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HC Debates 1955-56 vol 554 col 243, 12th June 1956.

<sup>2</sup> See A Short History of the YHA op.cit.

<sup>3</sup> LDR/G/90 op.cit.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Ninth Report (1958), p16.

<sup>5</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p23.

In the early 1960s the Commission invited the county councils to review the route in the light of the footpath maps which were being published at that time. Even this proved to be very time-consuming and it did not seem to help in the creation of the route. In sum, little progress could be recorded in the implementation of the route during the middle part of the Commission's life. In 1957 44 miles (72 km) were still outstanding<sup>1</sup>, while as late as 1965, ten years after the route had been approved, only a quarter of the necessary new rights of way had been negotiated.<sup>2</sup>

(e) South Devon Coast

The policy decision taken by the Commission in 1954 had made Offa's Dyke and the South Devon Coast Path priorities. In the case of the Devon route in particular a great deal of work was carried out on the route before it was submitted to the Minister and, in fact, the report was not made until 1958 because of the number of problems encountered.

The main problem was that much of the coast was already developed with private houses, often in the form of second homes, holiday camps and such like. This was a situation which generally did not affect British long-distance paths to any great degree, unlike the situation along the Appalachian Trail in North America, for example.

Generally, land-owners were not unwilling for routes to go through their land, particularly if compensation was involved. However, there were those who objected to the creation of new rights of way, such as one Devon land-owner who was willing to allow de facto access through his land, but refused to make a formal agreement. There were also those who objected to long-distance routes once they realised that routes would affect their property. One such was a Devon land-owner who wrote to the Times in 1957 complaining that the Commission wanted

<sup>1</sup> NPC Eighth Report (1957), p15.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p27.



to put a path through his  $7\frac{1}{2}$  acres on the coast, using compulsory purchase if necessary:

"In the case of the coastal footpath there is no economic necessity, no rational justification for invading my home. I bought the land freehold, and by all the ancient laws of this kingdom it is mine....This fundamental right of ownership is in jeopardy. I feel the facts should be put before the public in whose name the trespass is to be enforced. I believe that in Great Britain the state is composed of 50 million individuals, who do not wish it to be a monolithic totalitarian dictator; and that it exists to protect the rights of individuals and not to sweep them away." <sup>1</sup>

The amenity groups rallied to support the proposal in Devon and the Journal of the Commons Society, for example, pointed to the immense popularity of the coastal path being more important than "economic necessity". <sup>2</sup>

The Commission and the County Council attempted to avoid as many problems as possible by being seen to work closely with land-owners and local officials. It was helpful when Devon County Council convened a meeting in 1956 to which were invited the local authorities and land-owners. The Commissioners themselves visited problem spots and Sir Geoffrey Stuart King negotiated with the local authorities and the land-owners.

The Commission went out of its way to stress:

"We are anxious that the inception of the coast path should be accommodated by general goodwill; and in order to secure this we made some modifications to our original proposals. We hope that the compromise which we have suggested will enable general agreement to be reached." <sup>3</sup>

In the Commission's Eighth Report the same point was made, but the addition of the reference to the Commission's 'duties' does suggest a veiled threat that, in the long run, resistance would be futile because the route had to be created. The Commission maintained: "It is our earnest desire to carry out the duties laid upon us by Parliament with as much general goodwill as can be achieved." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Times 4th May 1957, p7e.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society vol XIII, 1957, p85.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), pl5.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Eighth Report (1957), pl4.

The report on the South Devon Coast Path was submitted to the Minister in 1958. The route would be 93 miles (149 km) in length and require just 18 miles (29 km) of new rights of way. The variety of the route and the fact that it would be extremely popular were stressed.<sup>1</sup>

The Minister approved the report in June 1959 and, recording this in its Tenth Annual Report, the Commission stressed: "Approval of these proposals does not mean that members of the public may walk where there is as yet no right of way."<sup>2</sup> In the same way that the public was often confused by private land within 'national' parks, so problems were arising with the public wanting to use approved long-distance routes which were not complete rights of way. There must have been concern that trespass would jeopardise negotiations.

Even with such extensive preparatory work, the South Devon Path proved no less difficult to create than other routes. Erosion added further complications, resulting in the Commission having to work on Varying Reports, while it was also pressed to find alternative paths to avoid walkers having to follow the busy coast road where difficulties were being experienced negotiating the approved route. River crossings had proved a problem in the planning of the route and it was disappointing for the Commission to have to agree to abandon its idea to construct a bridge over the River Otter, in order to save money.<sup>3</sup>

(f) Somerset and North Devon Coast

The Commission had decided in 1954 that the two routes to be worked on after the reports on Offa's Dyke and the South Devon Coast Path had been completed would be the Somerset and North Devon Coast Path and the Dorset Coast Path, in an attempt to complete the South-West Peninsula Path.

<sup>1</sup> NPC Ninth Report (1958), p16.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Tenth Report (1959), p17.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Fourteenth Report (1963), p22.

At first it had been planned to submit a report on the Somerset Coast section separately and, as with the other coast paths, the Commission worked closely with the County Council. Statutory consultations began in 1956<sup>1</sup>, but in 1957 it was decided that, because the section was only 15 miles (24 km) in length and had been devised to follow existing rights of way throughout, it should be combined with the North Devon section for the purposes of the report.

Considerable work had already been done on the proposal for the North Devon Path and, following a meeting of all the district councils concerned, convened by the County Council to enable the Commission to explain its proposals, statutory consultations began in the summer of 1956<sup>2</sup>. Sir Geoffrey Stuart King carried out further consultations, again illustrating the Commission's strategy of maximising consultations prior to a report being made, in order to minimise problems following the approval of a proposal.

The report was submitted in August 1959 for a route 82 miles (131 km) in length, needing some 27 miles (43 km) of new rights of way. In publicising the proposal, the Commission was particularly enthusiastic about the variety and quality of scenery of "this fascinating and bracing country."<sup>3</sup> The fact that the route crossed Exmoor National Park would be an advantage in the Commission's eyes, providing the Park with a major, well-publicised facility.

Nonetheless, even with so much preliminary work having been done on what was a relatively short route, it took the Minister no less than 17 months to approve the proposals (compared with 15 days in the case of the Pennine Way in 1951), and even then, problems were to confront the implementation of the route and progress was slow.

One particular problem which arose was that parts of the route were claimed to be dangerous, and much time and effort was expended on

<sup>1</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), p15.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p16.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Tenth Report (1962), p24.



making alternative routes and planning warning notices to alleviate any possible danger there might be for "careless and inexperienced walkers".<sup>1</sup> In one case a path was realigned even though the original path had been a right of way.

(g) The Dorset Coast

Attention was focussed on the last section of the South-West Peninsula Coast Path in 1955 and statutory consultations began in 1956 following close co-operation between the Commission and the local authorities concerned. Nevertheless, even though the route became the prime focus of the Commission's attention, it was to be five years before a report was made, partly because of the intensity of consultations and partly because of one particular problem confronting this route.

This concerned the Lulworth Gunnery Range and it proved impossible for the Commission to find an attractive and acceptable route round the range. This left a gap of five miles (8 km) where, in the words of the Commission, "the walker is excluded from one of the most agreeable parts of the coast".<sup>2</sup> Long-distance routes once again became involved in one of the long-lasting campaigns of the National Parks Commission - the fight against the Services occupying particularly attractive or recreationally significant parts of the countryside.

The delay in reporting on the route was particularly ironical as the Dorset Coast Path was only 72 miles (115 km) in length - the shortest to date, needing only five miles (8 km) of new rights of way and involving just eight local authorities. However, it touched sensitive issues, particularly concerning the situation at Lulworth Cove, and for the first time the minutes of the Commission recorded that the Commission required drafting amendments to the report of its Long-Distance Routes Committee.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p24.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Twelfth Report (1961), p21.

<sup>3</sup> NPC/M/61/7, 26th July 1961.

One novel feature of the route was an alternative loop which gave the hiker the choice of following the coast around Chesil Beach or taking a higher route inland - hitherto loop routes had been just bad-weather alternatives.

The Minister took no less than 18 months to approve the route which had been submitted to him in the latter part of 1961.<sup>1</sup> This was, in fact, in part because of another problem which arose concerning the War Office - this time where the proposed line for the route crossed a firing range at Chickerell. The Coastal Path had to be rerouted.

#### (h) The South Downs Way

As has been noted, a South Downs path had been suggested in evidence to the Addison Committee in 1931 and the idea was pursued by the Ramblers Association and some local authorities. It was an obvious choice for study by the Commission, having been recommended by the Hobhouse Special Committee, but it fell victim to the Commission's decision in 1954 to concentrate on a limited number of new routes. (The decision not to make the South Downs a National Park, as proposed in the main Hobhouse Report, seems to have had no effect on the proposal.)

The various county authorities and amenity groups retained their interest in the project through the 1950s and it attracted some interest from the media. For example, the Times publicised a competition run by the Commons Society to find a waymark for the path. 42 entries were received and the winning design was incorporated into concrete signs which were erected along the line of the unofficial route.<sup>2</sup> When the route joined the Dorset Coast Path as the "immediate objectives" of the Commission in its programme for long-distance routes in 1959,<sup>3</sup> there was considerable co-operation between the local

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fourteenth Report (1963), p22.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of the Commons Society, vol XIII, 1957-8.

<sup>3</sup> LDR/G/113, 9th October 1959.

authorities and the Commission. However, there is little evidence that the amenity groups, which had submitted to the Commission the results of a survey undertaken in 1951, were used. The new strategy of the Commission had little time for voluntary help because it felt it needed to be fully involved in each stage.

In 1960 the Commission decided to examine an extension of the route to Hampshire and Wiltshire (to join the proposed Ridgeway path)<sup>1</sup> but in its Twelfth Report it indicated that in the first instance the route in East and West Sussex would be the subject of a report. It also indicated that the route would be planned as a bridleway - the first to be put forward. It seems this was more because of the possibilities which presented themselves than because of much pressure from the trekking interests.

In 1962 there was a deliberation within the Commission whether the route should be called Queen Elizabeth's Way (which, it was claimed, was the local preference)<sup>2</sup> or the South Downs Way. The latter prevailed and in the summer of 1962 a report was submitted to the Minister for an 80 mile (128 km) route requiring just 9 miles (15 km) of new rights of way. It would run from Eastbourne to the boundary between West Sussex and Hampshire, mainly following the crest of the Downs. At the east end an alternative loop, just for walkers, would follow the coast to the Cuckmere Valley where it would rejoin the bridle path.<sup>3</sup> In this instance the Minister approved the route within a<sup>4</sup> year.

#### (1) Other Routes

In 1959, with the proposals for the Somerset and North Devon Coast Path submitted to the Minister, there was a need to decide which routes should become the priorities within the strategy devised in 1954. To this end a paper was presented to the Commission, reviewing

<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/60/3, 23rd March 1960.      <sup>2</sup> C/M/62/7, 24th July 1962.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), pp24-5.

<sup>4</sup> on 28th March 1963.



potential routes.<sup>1</sup> The Dorset Coast, a 'reserve' in 1954, and the South Downs route were by this time the first priorities and the decision had to be made which potential routes were to be examined next.

The paper listed the Flamborough Coast and North York Moors Path first, noting that the Ramblers Association and the Youth Hostels Association together with the county councils had pressed for this to become a long-distance route. Secondly, the Ridgeway had been the subject of a resolution calling for early consideration passed by the Southern Area of the Ramblers Association. Tom Stephenson had prepared a draft line for the route and the paper noted that both Ritchie and Brunsdon Yapp had considered it to be a good line. The third route which was listed was the Pilgrim's Way for which surveys undertaken by the Ramblers Association were available. The idea of the Welsh Highland Route was revived. Some work had already been carried out on this by the Commission's Field Officer, who had prepared a draft line for a route which had been tentatively agreed by the Long-Distance Routes Committee in 1955. Caernarvon County Council had asked that priority be given to this, but a desire that the disused Welsh Highland Railway be incorporated seems to have weighed against this proposal and, in fact, this seems to be the last time this route is considered by the Commission even though it was not formally rejected at this time. The fifth route was another suggestion put forward by the Ramblers Association, the Cotswolds Edge Way (suggested by the West of England Area, as early as 1952). However, the Long-Distance Routes Committee felt that, although this was attractive, it could not be a priority.

The Commission agreed at its meeting in November 1959 that these

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<sup>1</sup> LDR/G/113, 9th October 1959.

were indeed possible future routes and it made the decision that the Ridgeway and the North York Moors and Flamborough Coast routes should be formally adopted as the next routes for study.<sup>1</sup> The former was a long-standing contender, near to London and an immediately obvious line which had attracted attention during the debates on the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill. In fact, in 1956, following a public inquiry into development along the Ridgeway, the Air Ministry had agreed to site a proposed communications aerial away from the Ridgeway because it was a "proposed long-distance route".<sup>2</sup> The northern route was the first one which had not been recommended by the Hobhouse Special Committee, although it enjoyed considerable support from local authorities and amenity groups. In addition, much of it was within a national park and it was within a part of the country where there was a concentration of population with a tradition of rambling but where there were no other routes planned. However, there is no evidence that these factors were systematically examined and, characteristically, the decisions taken seem to have been arbitrary ones.<sup>3</sup>

Other routes were listed in the discussion paper but the Commission rejected a number of these as not being candidates for future consideration. These included the Thames Riverside Walk; a route from Bristol to London (proposed by the Bristol, Gloucestershire and Somerset Joint Advisory Committee in 1957 as a traditional walking route which could utilise the Thames towpath for part of its way); a 63 mile (101 km) route from Weybridge to Littlehampton to link the Pilgrims' Way and the South Downs Way (proposed by the Association of Surrey Amenity Societies supported by the Ramblers Association, and a route which had been agreed by the Commission's Long-Distance Routes Committee in October 1952 to be an attractive idea); an eastwards

<sup>1</sup> NPC/M/59/10, 25th November 1959.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), p49.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with Brunsdon Yapp and Frances Ritchie, May 1979.

extension of the Somerset Coast Path (suggested by the West of England Ramblers Association, running from Minehead to Bristol); a route round the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales, suggested by the Commons Society; a 24 mile (40 km) spur route from the Pembroke Coast Path following the Cleddau Estuary (proposed by the County Planning Committee to help open up an area of the National Park, and agreed in principle by the Long-Distance Routes Committee in 1954); and a Mariners' Way from Dartmouth to Bideford. Some of these suggestions had appeared on a map which the Commission published in 1953<sup>1</sup> and they illustrate the variety of interest in the idea of long-distance routes which there had been, particularly up to the middle of the decade.

In the event, the Dorset Coast and the South Downs routes took such a long time to examine before reports on them could be made that the Ridgeway was not considered in detail until 1963. Some progress was, however, made on the Yorkshire route. The Commission, meeting in 1959, had agreed that, if the East Riding part of the route, which extended only 20  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles (33 km), appeared likely to delay a report on the whole path (because of the possibility of delays producing the definitive footpaths map), the North Riding part of the route might be made the subject of a separate route<sup>2</sup> and this was in fact to be the case. However, the Commission's Twelfth Annual Report (for 1961) recorded disappointment that formal consultations could not yet begin, explaining that even though the County Council and the amenity groups had carried out surveys, the Commission felt that it was important that it should do its own<sup>3</sup> - the point Pauline Dower had stressed in her policy paper in 1957. Formal consultations on this 100 mile (160 km) route did, in fact, take place in 1963.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced as Map 1 (following page 176)

<sup>2</sup> NPC/M/59/10, 25th November 1959.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Twelfth Report (1961), p22.



## 5. THE MIDDLE PART OF THE COMMISSION'S LIFE - CONCLUSION

The first impression of the middle part of the National Parks Commission's programme for long-distance routes, from the mid 1950s to about 1961, is one of lack of enthusiasm, publicity and progress, compared with the first period. No reports on new routes were made between 1954 and 1958 and the four reports made towards the end of the period were for routes each less than 100 miles (160 km) in length. There was seemingly little interest in long-distance routes outside the Commission, either in Parliament or in the Times for example, compared with the early 1950s. Support did continue from user groups but these declined in membership and in influence during the period.

However, the Commission had decided upon a strategy which deliberately limited the number of routes being examined at any one time, in order to increase the intensity of its involvement in the planning and negotiating of routes, with the clear aim of speeding up the creation of routes in the long run. It had stuck to this and the strategy was confirmed and given more structure following Pauline Dower's review of the programme in 1957 and her 10-point plan of action. Just two routes were examined in detail at a time with a concerted effort being made to anticipate the kinds of problems which were holding up the implementation of the earlier routes. To this end, the Commission deployed all its available manpower on field visits, meetings and negotiations far in excess of its statutory responsibilities.

It is clear, therefore, that the Commission did not lose its interest in long-distance routes; on the contrary, they seem to have taken up an increasing amount of the Commission's time. However, there is little sign of the new strategy having been successful, although no doubt many potential problems were defused. Even with

numerous site visits by King, various Commissioners and the Commission's staff, and even with the gradual appearance of the maps of rights of way during the period, there was little sign of speeding up the implementation of routes. Indeed, more and more problems were arising and, in the case of approved routes, problems caused by coastal erosion and pressure from local authorities, land-owners, user groups and the Ministry itself led to numerous Varying Reports having to be researched and reported, and these took up an increasing amount of the Commission's time. The Eleventh Annual Report of the Commission lamented:

"The approved long-distance routes continue to present us with problems, consideration of which consumes a very great deal of time"<sup>1</sup>

The same Report continued: "It is a matter of regret that after more than ten years of work not a single long-distance route has yet been completed on the ground."<sup>2</sup> This was a major disappointment, the fact that no routes were opened during the period. Indeed, it was inconceivable during the first two thirds of the 1950s that the Pennine Way, at the very least, would not be opened by the end of the decade. However, the Pennine Way illustrated the two major problems being confronted in the implementation of routes. The first was the extremely slow rate of negotiating even the straightforward sections of the route, frequently because of the nature of the district councils involved in the negotiations, which often lacked the motivation or the expertise to act. In the case of the Pennine Way, which had been approved in 1951, 38 miles (60 km) of the route had still to be acquired as right of way as the Commission entered the middle period of its life. 24 extra miles (38 km) had been negotiated by the end of 1954, 12 miles (19 km) in 1955, 11 miles (17 km) in 1956 and 10 miles (16 km) in 1957, illustrating the slow rate of progress

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Eleventh Report (1960), pl8.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

for what were by and large straightforward sections. The second major problem was when deadlock was reached. For example, it was the last six miles (9 km) which remained to be completed which were to hold up the Pennine Way into the 1960s. The situation encountered in Northumberland, in particular, illustrated the problem of an intransigent land-owner, for it was clear by this time that the Ministry would support a footpath creation order only in an extreme case, where every other avenue had been explored.

So far as the former problem was concerned, the Commission focussed on the multiplicity of local authorities involved and this rather than a plea for administrative assistance for districts became the main part of the Commission's requests for legislative reform influencing the Commission's submission to the Minister in 1961 that county councils rather than district councils should implement routes. So far as the latter problem was concerned, it was the hope of the Commission that the extra work it was doing before reporting on the newer routes would avoid similar major problems being encountered.

The Commission was still reluctant to accept the inevitability of the slow rate of progress with long-distance routes and at the beginning of the 1960s it was pressing the Ministry to help. The Commission had been able to record with some pleasure that Dr Charles Hill (who replaced Henry Brooke as Minister following the General Election in 1959) had stressed the importance of creating rights of way to complete long-distance routes in a speech to the Rural District Council's Association.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time the Commission's minutes recorded that because of the lack of progress<sup>2</sup> more representations would have to be made to the Ministry.

In May 1962 Francis Ritchie met a Mrs Ward from the Ministry, but the Ministry again resisted increasing its involvement in long-

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p21.

<sup>2</sup> C/M/62/3, 27th March 1962.



distance routes. It was concluded that the existing strategy was the best available:

"It was generally agreed by the Commission that the best solution to the problem lay in frequent personal contact with the local authorities concerned, and that, since the Ministry were unable to undertake this, the work could best be done by an officer of the Commission.' 1

This illustrates that there had been no change in the Ministry's attitude since similar discussions were held in 1954 when the Commission was devising its strategy for its programme of long-distance routes. At that time the Ministry had offered the Commission the services of Sir Geoffrey Stuart King. This time the Ministry promised extra staff for the Commission's work on long-distance routes.

Despite the continuing disappointments, the Commission could claim significant progress, considering its extremely limited staff and the complexity of the problems being encountered. Up to mid-1962 nine reports had been submitted to the Minister, altogether representing some 1180 miles (1900 km) of long-distance routes, including reports for the whole of the South-West Peninsula Coast Path. Almost 150 local authorities had been involved in the consultations.

The Commission could point to other successes, particularly in its endeavours to keep standards high and impact low. Following the acceptance of the Commission's standardised signpost for the Pennine Way in 1960, the Commission introduced a uniform 'Coast Path' sign which the Ministry commended to the counties. The Commission reiterated its policy that:

"In open country signposts should seldom, if ever, be needed. The long-distance walker will normally be following a map and should not want additional directional aid except in places of special difficulty or doubt." 2

It fought hard to prevent fences being erected alongside paths where

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1 C/M/62/5, 22nd May 1962.

2 NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p22.

it considered them inessential - Rossiter found cases on the Cornish coast where access agreements were not carried through because they would have led to fences being erected near to the Coast Path and it was felt that even ploughing the land was preferable to a fence.<sup>1</sup>

Even with the increasing problems demanding attention from the Commission and its limited staff, long-distance routes continued to hold their central position in the Commission's programme and one must conclude that it was the National Parks Commission that was largely responsible for keeping alive the development of long-distance routes in England and Wales during this period. It confronted a massive number of daunting problems and setbacks, most of them unforeseen a decade earlier, with very little outside help and without major successes, such as the completion of a route, to stimulate it. The last period of the Commission's life was entered with a number of routes very close to completion and with the hope that all the extra work done on the newer routes would bear fruit. Moreover, the Commission had been promised extra staff to help in its programme of long-distance routes and this was at a time when there were signs that an increasing amount of attention was about to be paid to the development of facilities in the countryside - a situation that could only help long-distance routes.

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<sup>1</sup> Rossiter op.cit. p333.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE FINAL YEARS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The middle years of the 1960s saw dramatic changes taking place in the countryside, the result of technological developments and recreational pressures - with the impact of the private motor car of particular importance. Consideration of the impact of these added to the workload of the National Parks Commission - in the year 1964-65, for instance, it examined no fewer than 504 questions relating to development. Equally important were the changes taking place in attitudes to the countryside during this period, influenced in part by the growing pressures, but also by the increase in academic research into countryside matters. This was epitomised by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) in America, which published its study reports in 1962 and had a considerable international impact. In Great Britain the Countryside in 1970 Conferences were also influential. More interest in the countryside was exhibited by politicians and the subject of recreation in the countryside began to be viewed from a much wider standpoint than hitherto.

The trend was to shift attention from the grand schemes, such as the national parks, to more local and intensively used recreation sites, following the American example. Nevertheless, the general increase in the attention paid to the countryside and to outdoor recreation meant that, although national parks may have begun to decline in relative importance, in absolute terms they benefitted from the much greater interest and expenditure, and they became more widely used than hitherto.



A similar pattern can be seen with long-distance paths, for although attention began to be placed on schemes of more regional and local significance, the popularity of long-distance routes grew considerably during the mid-1960s and they once more attracted a large amount of attention and support from a number of different quarters. In fact, despite all the changes, the Commission's policy for developing routes continued unaltered through the remaining years of its life, although at long last schemes begun in the early 1950s began to reach fruition.

## 2. THE PENNINE WAY

### (a) The Completion of the Route

The remaining section of the Pennine Way which was not a right of way was in Northumberland, north of Bellingham. The Commission's 13th Report had recorded that it had "for a very long time indeed striven to find a solution to the problems in Redesdale, Northumberland, which would be acceptable to both the landowners concerned and to the users of the route."<sup>1</sup> However, finding that "all possible solutions have now been fully explored", the Commission decided to submit proposals for a variation to the original line. In fact, the Commission still had not acted by 1963 and the Times referred to the route as "a monument to procrastination".<sup>2</sup> Two questions were asked in the House of Commons about the delay in 1963 and finally Northumberland County Council, having taken over the duties of creating footpaths from Bellingham Rural District Council, and impatient at the impasse, submitted public path orders for both the alternatives being considered.<sup>3</sup>

Following this, the Commission did submit its Varying Report but the route it chose was not the one proposed by the Ramblers

<sup>1</sup> NPC Thirteenth Report (1962), p23.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 13th February 1963, p5b.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Fourteenth Report (1963), p21.

Association which was preferred by the County Council and the Commons Society. The Minister called a public inquiry in March 1964 and the Ramblers Association objected to the Commission's route arguing that, as it took the walker for a long distance along a metalled road and then forest tracks constructed for heavy vehicles, it was "totally out of keeping with the conception of the Pennine Way"<sup>1</sup>. Stephenson claimed that the influence of one land-owner and the National Farmers Union (NFU) had caused the Commission to go against the user groups. There is evidence that, from this period, opposition from the landed interests was beginning to become more organised in the country as a whole and groups such as the NFU began to exert more and more pressure on the Commission, a factor of considerable importance during the life of the Countryside Commission.

The Ministry's inspector recommended the alternative route across the moorland as proposed by the Ramblers Association<sup>2</sup> but in September 1964 the user groups were disappointed to learn that the Minister had reached a different decision, in favour of the Commission's route. The Times reported Arthur Blenkinsop's bitter response that "The Minister had given us nothing at all. The whole idea of the Pennine Way was to keep walkers off the road."<sup>3</sup> He pressed for general access to be granted to the uncultivated moorlands in question and he raised the matter again in Parliament in 1967<sup>4</sup> but to no avail.

The Commission's Annual Report made no mention of the major dispute surrounding the decision, which seems to have activated the amenity groups again, at least so far as the media were concerned. The decision did, however, mean that the Pennine Way was now a right of way for the whole of its length.

<sup>1</sup> The Times 18th March 1964, p6b.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tom Stephenson, May 1979.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 8th September 1964, p12c.

HC Reports 1966-67 vol 743 cols 1040-1.

(b) The Opening of the Pennine Way

On 24th April 1965 the opening ceremony for the Pennine Way, the first long-distance route in England and Wales to be completed, took place at Malham, with over three thousand ramblers present and about 250 representatives of local authorities invited by the Commission. Lord Strang, the Chairman of the Commission, Fred Willey, the Minister of Land and Natural Resources and Tom Stephenson were the principal speakers and the Commission acknowledged: "It was Tom Stephenson's<sup>1</sup> day."

The event attracted considerable publicity, being featured on television and in many newspapers. The Times for example, reviewed the route and its history, and commented: "It is hard to believe that industrial England is never far away."<sup>2</sup> It asserted that "any reasonably good walker can accomplish the journey," although an editorial in the same newspaper predicted that the route would not open up the wild, lonely Pennines, which, it said, using George Barrow's description, were "unsociable". The Guardian used the occasion to record some of the weaknesses in the existing legislation on national parks and long-distance routes and an editorial noted how the ceremony would mark "the formal end to thirty years of striving (not to say strife at times)"<sup>3</sup> The Guardian's editorial also noted Strang's comment that it took an "unconscionable" time to create long-distance routes and his hope that the procedures would be improved to avoid the delays.

Willey had echoed this at the ceremony, saying "I am appalled at the thought that it has taken fourteen years from approval to completion and I hope that we will learn from our experience."<sup>4</sup>

However, he had also looked to the future, promising a new policy for the countryside, and warning that long-distance routes and national

<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p4.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 23rd April 1965, p13f.

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian 24th April 1965, p8e.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p77.



parks must be seen in the national context, which, as is examined later, reflected the Government's changing thinking on the countryside.

For his part, Stephenson's speech had concentrated on practical matters, such as the need for extra accommodation, and he hoped that the Commission and the local authorities would protect the route from tarmac, pylons and afforestation.<sup>1</sup>

(c) Management of the Route

In fact, at the end of the same week, the Guardian once again reported an appeal by Stephenson, this time in support of Heston Rural District Council which was opposed to pylons being put across the Hebden Valley and thus spoiling the environment of the Pennine Way.

The Commission did concern itself with problems of development along the route, looking into the problem of the use of parts of the route by motor cyclists, for example. However, it put most effort into producing information for users of the Pennine Way.<sup>2</sup> It published its first leaflet on the route in 1965, receiving 4,000 requests for copies within two weeks of issuing a press release, and a further print of 25,000 copies was made to cover the demand from both the United Kingdom and overseas following the opening of the route. The Commission was disappointed to record technical problems being encountered in the production of the official guide book, which Tom Stephenson had begun writing in 1956, and in fact this was not to be published until 1969. There were, however, other books and pamphlets on the route, such as Kenneth Oldham's The Pennine Way,<sup>3</sup> first published in 1960, and the Ramblers Association's pamphlet. Other material appeared following the opening of the route, for example,

<sup>1</sup> The Guardian 26th April 1965, p16.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p29.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Oldham The Pennine Way Dalesman, 1960.

Alan Binns' Walking the Pennine Way (1966)<sup>1</sup> and Christopher Wright's Guide to the Pennine Way(1967)<sup>2</sup> . The Commission continued to work with the local authorities to erect map boards at some twenty key points along the route.

The Commission considered that it had an important liaison role to play, forwarding specific comments and complaints about the route to the relevant highway authorities, for example. It worked with the local authorities to examine problems of erosion of the path. The crossing of Grindsbrook at Edale was an example. It had dominated the Peak Park Planning Board's reports on the Pennine Way from the mid-1950s because of the difficulties encountered in negotiating a route, and soon after the opening of the route Commissioners had to visit the path to the bridge which was causing problems because of erosion. It was decided to reinstate the original line for the route to avoid the erosion, but the Board's Annual Report for 1968 recorded that the path had after all been strengthened - although now the bridge itself needed replacing.<sup>3</sup> It has been said that the simple log bridge at the start of the Pennine Way is symbolic of the natural qualities and simple nature of the route. However, with the multitude of problems which beset the route's crossing of Grindsbrook, the log bridge also turned out to be symbolic of the route in a different way, exemplifying the delays, problems and frustrations besetting it.

Waymarking continued to be a major concern of the Commission and an important management consideration. In 1966 it developed its ideas further, publishing a list of principles for waymarking the Pennine Way:

1 Alan Binns Walking the Pennine Way Gerrard (Nelson), 1966.

2 C.J.Wright Guide to the Pennine Way Constable, 1967.

3 Peak Park Planning Board Annual Report no 16, 1968, p34.

- (i) The oak sign would be used at the exits from a village or farm, where the path left a road or in woodlands;
- (ii) On farmland, the oak sign or short, white-topped posts with a special symbol (which was being devised);
- (iii) On stony hills, cairns should be used, with arrows or symbols if necessary;
- (iv) On marshy land, cairns of local stone, and "only exceptionally" white-topped posts; and
- (v) Where the Way left a fence on open moorland or followed a fence at right angles, the oak sign, the symbol or a splash of white paint should be used.<sup>1</sup>

As has been seen, the Commission concentrated on establishing routes on the ground in the first instance, with consideration of facilities such as accommodation being deferred. However, by now accommodation was presenting a problem along the Pennine Way and the shortcomings became more publicised as an increasing number of people hiked the route. Barbara Castle had drawn the Government's attention in 1963 in the House of Commons to the long stretches of the Pennine Way without overnight accommodation, noting that Derbyshire, the West Riding and Northumberland were particularly bad and she reminded the Government of the provision in the 1949 Act for such facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs Castle had also noted the existence of plans for a hostel at Crowden in Longdendale, complaining that this had been too long in the planning stage. In fact, just over a month after the opening of the Pennine Way, Crowden Hostel was opened by Fred Willey in a well-publicised ceremony. Funding for the hostel had been provided under the 1949 Act (although under Section 67, which dealt with National Parks, rather than Section 68, which dealt exclusively with long-distance routes), with the Exchequer providing 75% of the £24,000 needed and the Peak Park Planning Board providing the balance. The Youth Hostels Association was to manage the hostel and refreshment facilities on behalf of the Board, which would be the owner, and YHA

<sup>1</sup> Summarised from NPC Seventeenth Report (1966), p27.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1962-63 vol 681 cols 700-1, 18th July 1963.



member<sup>1</sup> and the general public alike would be able to use it. Crowden Hostel was enlarged just three years later and also in 1968 a purpose-built hostel and visitor centre was provided along the Pennine Way at  
<sup>2</sup>  
Once Brewed in Northumberland.

These brought publicity to the route, as did two decisions regarding the rerouting of the Way. At last filtration plants were introduced to the reservoirs in Longdendale and the Commission was able to make a Varying Report rerouting the Pennine Way to the original line which had been lost in the bitter struggles of the mid-1950s. This section of the route was changed in 1965. The second decision was also greeted with much pleasure by the Commission and user groups alike. It involved the new M62 Lancashire to Yorkshire Motorway, which was to cross the Pennine Way at Standedge in the West Riding and presented a serious threat to the continuity of the route. However, largely because of the personal interest of the Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, a special footbridge was included in the plans for the motorway and, although the construction of the road caused temporary disruption of the Pennine Way, the building of the footbridge was considered a major success.

(d) The Survey of the Pennine Way

A further management project which caused interest was a survey of use of the route conducted in the summer of 1965. This had, in fact,  
<sup>3</sup>  
been pressed for in Parliament by Blenkinsop. It covered questions such as the duration of walking, accommodation use, methods of route  
<sup>4</sup>  
finding, publicity, equipment and age-range of the hikers. However, it was of limited value in itself, being more useful in providing some basis for assessing trends in comparison with the results of future surveys.

<sup>1</sup> The Guardian 5th June 1965, p3.

<sup>2</sup> Countryside Commission for England and Wales (CC) First Report (1968) p40

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1964-65 vol 715 col 9, 28th June 1965.

<sup>4</sup> NPC Pennine Way Survey of Use 1966 (unpublished pamphlet).

In the survey 512 interviews were undertaken on four separate days in July and August 1965 at fifteen check-points, away from what were considered the most popular sections of the route. The survey had been designed to maximise the proportion of long-distance hikers and, of those interviewed, 63% (323) were out for more than two days, while over a half said that they intended to walk over 100 miles (160 km) and a third (165) said that they intended to walk the whole length of the Pennine Way in one holiday. Nevertheless, the Report admitted that no reliable estimate of the use of the Pennine Way could be inferred from the survey.

The survey revealed that half of those interviewed had heard of the Pennine Way through the media, confirming the importance of the widespread coverage of the opening of the route earlier in the year. However, some 5% said they did not realise that they were on the Pennine Way and the Report added: "some of these did not know there was a Pennine Way."<sup>1</sup>

The survey was useful in confirming some of the problems which walkers experienced, such as finding the route and finding suitable accommodation (pointing to a need for more youth hostels, in particular.) It was also useful in bringing together the various interested parties, both in the survey, which used volunteers from the amenity groups, and, following the analysis of the results of the survey, in meetings which were held with user groups and with local authorities to draw up programmes of work.

The Pennine Way, then, was opened, was well-publicised by the media and by the Commission itself, and, according to the survey, was being well-used (although in 1967 parts were closed because of a major epidemic of foot and mouth disease). Furthermore, a number of decisions had been made and facilities created which were particularly

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1 ibid.



pleasing to the Commission and to the user groups, and which encouraged speculation that the Pennine Way would provide a significant stimulus for the more speedy establishment of other routes.

### 3. OTHER ROUTES

#### (a) The South-West Peninsula Coast Path

In fact, there is very little evidence that the success with the Pennine Way had any effect on the establishment of the Peninsula Path. As before, progress with the various sections of the 515 mile (824 km) path was slow. In 1965, for example, some 60 miles (96 km) of new rights of way were still needed to complete the route, including over 20 miles (32 km) in Cornwall<sup>1</sup> where the route had been approved by 1954. However, progress did take place, helped in part by the attention focussed on the coastlines of England and Wales by planners, with the Ministry's circular 'Coastal Preservation and Development', for example, urging local authorities to fulfil their duties regarding the establishment of the Coast Path.

Work with local authorities and on Varying Reports, particularly those resulting from severance of the route due to coastal erosion, took up much of the Commission's time. Furthermore, problems continued with land-owners, and the problems in Devon were raised by a local MP in Parliament on behalf of a constituent. The MP asked why paths had been authorised where there were none before and what evidence did the Minister decide that the paths, made at Government expense and at "considerable inconvenience to farmers" would be to "the convenience and enjoyment of a substantial section of the

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), pp27/8.



public".<sup>1</sup> The Parliamentary Secretary answered that it had been long accepted that the coastal route was "extremely desirable", adding:

"in the normal case rights of way and footpaths do not go along the coast; they have usually gone from point to point where people have passed in the normal course. For leisure purposes, on the other hand, it has been necessary to create the new footpaths. This has been outstanding for a very long time now and I had hoped that the House would be glad that we were getting a move on with it."<sup>2</sup>

An article in the Times in 1967 gave credit for the creation of the Coast Path to the National Trust (through its Operation Neptune) but it suggested that it would be a long time before the whole coast would be accessible through a right of way being provided and by paths being made and cleared.<sup>3</sup> This moved the Chairman of the Cornwall County Planning Committee to reply that over 70% of the 268 miles (429 km) of coastal path in the County was now usable. In fact, this meant that, in addition to that part of the Path which was still not a right of way, over 70 miles (112 km) was a right of way but was unusable.

The problem of clearing the various coast paths was indeed a major one and added a further set-back to the Commission's hopes for the early completion of routes. However, the continuity of these routes was perhaps not as critical as the continuity of a route like the Pennine Way, because the coastal routes were recognised as being more for shorter walks than for long-distance hikes, which, as the Pennine Way survey had confirmed, was the major objective in designating cross-country routes. With increased signposting, clearing and publicity, nationally and locally, and with mapboards being provided, use of the coastal routes seems to have increased during the 1960s.

#### (b) The Pembroke Coast Path

These comments also apply to the Pembroke Coast Path, which had

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1966-67 vol 736 col 5, 14th November 1966.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Times 9th February 1967, p10g.

been approved in 1953. However, major problems beset this route as the Pembrokeshire estuaries were developed by oil-related industries based on the deep-water terminals. Nevertheless, the large corporations involved generally proved to be cooperative and the presence of the Coast Path seems to have been considered in planning decisions. Although the environment of the route was ruined in places - where the Path was contained between barbed wire security fences, for example - the Commission could claim in 1964 that negotiations<sup>1</sup> along the Path were almost complete.

In fact, about six miles (9 km) of the 66 miles (106 km) of new rights of way that had been required were still outstanding. The following year the Commission's optimism was spoilt by a further complication. The Annual Report revealed that because, under the Grants Regulations, a certificate from the District Valuer was needed for payments in excess of £5, in practice the District Valuer was doing much of the negotiating himself, and, because of the limited<sup>2</sup> time available to him, long delays were occurring.

One advantage of this particular route was the availability of the National Park wardens, who were able to carry out maintenance work on the Path and to erect signposts. A mini-tractor also proved very successful on the Pembroke Coast Path, clearing the lush vegetation along stretches of the route (although it did invoke some criticism<sup>3</sup> about the environmental impact it was having). Nevertheless, after the very enthusiastic start developing the Pembroke route, there was widespread disappointment that by the end of the life of the National Parks Commission it had not been completed, a disappointment expressed by Lord Merthyr and Lord Chorley in questions in Parliament in 1967.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fifteenth Report (1964), p36.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p26.

<sup>3</sup> J.Barrat Geographical Magazine op.cit..

<sup>4</sup> HL Reports 1966-67 vol 280 col 290, 23rd February 1967 and vol 283 cols 801-2, 13th June 1967.



(c) Offa's Dyke Path

The Commission made a special effort with Offa's Dyke Path, as has been seen, but it was disappointed to have to record in 1964 that it seemed that the duty of creating the necessary rights of way:

"has been put a long way down among the desirable schemes which the local authorities need to implement. It is particularly sad when this attitude is taken in an area which is ahead of many other counties in the survey of existing rights of way."<sup>1</sup>

To add to its problems with this route, a field advisor employed by the Commission resigned in September 1964, putting back the programme and illustrating again the importance of individuals in what was an extremely small-scale operation. The Ramblers Association continued to assist the Commission - although its involvement sometimes led to more work for the Commission, such as in its suggesting of variations to the approved route. One such variation was a loop along the River Wye, which was in fact adopted.

By the end of the period progress could be claimed, with Flint County Council having taken over duties to negotiate rights of way from its rural district councils, and with the Commission becoming directly involved in negotiations over footpaths elsewhere. However out of the 45 miles (72 km) of new rights of way needed when the route was approved in 1955, over 33 miles (54 km) still remained to be negotiated in 1965. Frustration led to the setting up in 1968 of a voluntary Offa's Dyke Action Committee in an attempt to speed up the creation of the route, and to disseminate information about the Path - information which the Committee claimed was completely lacking,<sup>2</sup> even though the Commission had proudly recorded that the route had<sup>3</sup> been the subject of a television documentary as early as 1956.

<sup>1</sup> NPC Fifteenth Report (1964), p15.

<sup>2</sup> Rucksack vol 4,6, April 1968, p20.

<sup>3</sup> NPC Seventh Report (1956), p63.



(d) The South Downs Way

When this route was approved in 1963, just 9 miles (15 km) of new bridleway were needed to complete the 80 mile (128 km) route. A westward extension into Hampshire was considered subsequent to the approval, but there was little progress considering this until the 1970s.

Progress was relatively rapid in the mid-1960s, particularly in East Sussex which had the advantage of a County Footpaths Officer who became involved in negotiations, waymarking and clearing of the route. In addition, a purpose-built hostel was opened at Truleigh Hill on the South Downs Way, in 1968. Waymarking was carried out in a comprehensive manner, with the Commission agreeing to the use of the concrete sign, the winner of the competition sponsored by the Commons Society in 1957, conceding that such a waymark would be less conspicuous along the crest of the Downs than the oak signpost.

A problem arose in June 1965 when 450 motorists demonstrated against roads being closed along the line of the route, although in fact the motorists' fears were unfounded, for as yet the Commission had no intentions to use its powers to recommend traffic restrictions along long-distance routes.<sup>1</sup>

The route proved popular and attracted much attention, even before its completion. The novelty of a long-distance bridleway was part of the reason for this. For instance, an article appeared in the Times describing a five-day trek along the route: "This simple way of life has its roots in nature and seems wholly satisfying," the correspondent wrote.<sup>2</sup> However, the point was made that a considerable amount of planning was needed to take a horse along a long-distance

<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p63.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 7th June 1965, p9f.

route because of the difficulties in feeding and accommodating<sup>1</sup> horses.

At the end of the Commission's life, only one mile (1.5 km) was left to complete the route - although, in fact, the last short section was to prove difficult and the South Downs Way would not be officially opened until mid-1972.

(e) The Yorkshire Coast and North York Moors Path

Planning for this route had progressed fairly rapidly, partly because of the enthusiasm of the amenity groups concerned and the County Council. The Commission was able to complete its formal consultations and submit a report to the Minister in 1964. The newly-appointed Minister of Land and Natural Resources, who was now responsible for the Commission and for long-distance routes in England, approved the route in February 1965, giving the fifteen local authorities the task of creating some 12 miles (20 km) of new rights<sup>2</sup> of way out of a total length of 93 miles (149 km).

The route was to run from Helmsley, where a grant-aided hostel had been opened in 1964, along the north rim of the North York moors to the coast, and thence to the boundary of the North and East Ridings near Filey. Progress on the implementation of the route was also rapid although a further two miles (3 km) of new rights of way were found to be required, and it just failed to be completed within the lifetime of the National Parks Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), p24.

(f) Ridgeway

A route along the Ridgeway gradually became a priority for the Commission during the 1960s although it was decided to concentrate in the first instance on the middle part of the route which had been originally proposed by Tom Stephenson. Instead of involving nine counties, just Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire County Councils were consulted in the first instance<sup>1</sup>, but even so progress was very slow, mainly because of the lack of manpower available to the Commission's heavily-committed programme of long-distance routes. Before formal consultations began Commissioners and representatives of the local authorities walked parts of the proposed route and further delays were incurred with the decisions to extend the proposal to Wiltshire and also to examine the long-standing problems of vehicles on the route. A survey of users and vehicles took place in July 1967 and, in fact, the route was not ready for reporting during the lifetime of the National Parks Commission.

(g) The North Downs Way

Following the submission of the report on the Yorkshire route in 1964, the Commission concentrated on the Ridgeway and a North Downs Route. Considerable preliminary work had been done on the Downs route by amenity groups from London and by the county councils. Surrey, in particular, wanted the route to be part of its ambitious plans for access among and in between the Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, one complication with the plan was that the Pilgrim's Way, the focus of the original proposals, proved to have been metalled along several sections and in other sections was indefinable as a single line. In fact, the North Downs Way became based on another historical route, an ancient ridgeway along the crest

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Fourteenth Report (1963), p23.



of the Downs, although in many places this did coincide with the Pilgrims Way.

Although the route ran so close to London and through a very heavily populated area, development along the crest of the Downs was not a major problem (as it had been along the Devon coast, for example) partly because of topographical constraints to building, partly through the preservation of tracts of land within large estates and partly because of the planning controls and the legislation for green belts developed during the twentieth century. For similar reasons, the tree cover had remained along much of the line of the route.

One planning problem which was encountered by the Commission was in deciding the termini for the route. In the west, the plan to extend the route to Winchester proved to be too ambitious and it was decided to terminate it at Farnham. In the east, there was difficulty in deciding whether to plan the route to Dover by way of Canterbury or by way of the Downs. In the first instance it was decided to follow the crest of the Downs<sup>1</sup>, but then Kent County Council persuaded the Commission to plan a loop to run through Canterbury. This was adopted because of its historical interest, because it provided variety and because of its local support.<sup>2</sup>

Statutory consultations with the three county councils and 22 district councils began in March 1966 and progress was rapid, allowing the report to be prepared as one of the last actions of the National Parks Commission<sup>3</sup>, the report being dated 2nd August 1968 which was the day before the Countryside Act came into force creating the Countryside Commission.

The North Downs Way was to run some 141 miles (226 km) and 36 miles (58 km) of new rights of way were required. The report stressed the

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1 NPC Seventeenth Report (1966), p27.

2 NPC Eighteenth Report (1967), p29.

3 The North Downs Way Report by the NPC, 1968.

variety of scenic and historical interest of the route and, because of its proximity to London, its importance for short-distance walking was also emphasised. The report contained the usual recommendations regarding the desirability of the path having a harmonious appearance and it pressed for a high standard of work and of waymarking. Where the route had to follow the busier roads, the creation of paths just off the road was proposed and in one instance a footbridge over a main road was proposed. No recommendations were made for accommodation or for traffic restrictions or for further road bridges, but the report indicated that these matters would be reviewed.

#### 4. THE PROGRAMME FOR LONG DISTANCE ROUTES

In 1962 the Treasury had reviewed the administration of the Commission to see where savings could be made and it had recommended that all the Commission's committees be abolished, with the exception of the Long-Distance Routes Committee.<sup>1</sup> This Committee had been chaired by Francis Ritchie from its re-establishment in 1954 (Tom Stephenson had chaired the original Committee) and Ritchie continued to be its chairman until October 1965 when Brunsdon Yapp took over for a few months. The Committee, unaided by any legislative amendments or intervention by the Ministry in the implementation of approved routes, continued its limited rolling programme, concentrating on just two routes to be taken though to the reporting stage at any time. Emphasis continued to be put on negotiating before the report stage and frequent contact following the approval of a proposal to encourage the local authorities to fulfil their obligation to create the rights of way necessary to complete the routes.

There are more signs that the Commission was making more progress. Its staff were becoming more proficient and experienced.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Brunsdon Yapp, May 1979.



Nevertheless, there seemed to be an infinite number of problems for the limited staff to cope with, such as the severance of routes through erosion, difficulties developing over negotiations, reticent local authorities, demands by the Services, and, increasingly, following the opening of the Pennine Way, inquiries from the public for information on long-distance paths. That the Commission's responsibilities did not end with the submission of the original report on a new route is illustrated by the fact that ten or more Varying Reports had to be prepared and submitted each year on already-approved routes, and these could be very time-consuming. Moreover, the Commission had taken upon itself the extra-statutory task of supervising the local authorities in their execution of the proposals.

At the end of 1963 the Commission reviewed a trial period of six months during which the field officers had spent at least twelve days per month carrying out field work on long-distance routes, concentrating primarily on the South-West Peninsula and Pembroke Coast Paths. One of the objectives set for the trial period had been for the officers to visit each of the 28 local authorities on these routes which had outstanding negotiations. However, this had not been achieved, and the review paper concluded:

"The progress reported does not look impressive, though it is more real than it appears, but it is not enough. If pressures can be kept up the programme should increase in momentum."<sup>1</sup>

This reflected the conflicting current optimism and frustration that the Commission felt about its programme for long-distance routes. The paper continued that if the Commission was to extend its help and influence to other local authorities, such as the 21 on Offa's Dyke or the seven on the South Downs Way, or those on the routes in the pipeline, at least twice as much time must be spent in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> NPC LDR Committee Report L27 - 'Progressing of Long Distance Routes', November 1963.



However, there was no increase in staff or other help forthcoming and the Annual Report of the Commission<sup>1</sup> recorded that it could not further develop its programme until it received extra staff. Carol Johnson raised this matter in a Parliamentary question at the end of 1965, and received a favourable reply from the Government that extra staff would be available "as soon as circumstances permit."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in 1967, the Commission's staff began a dramatic increase, as will be seen later, in anticipation of the change from the National Parks Commission to the Countryside Commission. A separate section for long-distance routes was created, as had been advocated ten years earlier by Pauline Dower. The Commission maintained that the first priority of the new section was to clear up the back-log of work on the routes already planned, and at the end of the Commission's life the policy of direct involvement in some negotiations to create rights of way had been established. Indeed, it was claimed to be providing immediate results in some cases, and one particular advantage was that staff could make on-the-spot decisions regarding minor modifications<sup>3</sup> of the routes, which made negotiations with land-owners much simpler.

Other work undertaken by the Commission concentrated on the management of routes, as has been discussed in the context of the Pennine Way. More emphasis began to be put on the provision of accommodation, for example, and way-marking was further developed. In 1966, the Commission approved a supplementary form of waymarking, which it had soon become apparent would be needed in addition to cairns and signposts. It decided on an acorn as the symbol. The advantage of this was that it could easily be stencilled onto a number of different surfaces and could also be reproduced as a plaque. It was also helpful as a logo for the Commission to use in its publicity material which was being developed during the 1960s. It had been

<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), pp24-5.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1965-66 vol 722 cols 351-2, 20th December 1965.

<sup>3</sup> CC First Report (1968), p27.

decided that the Commission need not wait for the completion of a route before publicising stretches of it and, to this end, a series of leaflets was produced. These proved to be among the most popular of the Commission's publications.

Because of the policy of strictly limiting the number of routes under examination and concentrating on those already approved, there was little need to consider new routes. However, towards the end of the Commission's life several references were made to suggestions for possible new routes.

The first mention of a possible new project came at the end of 1967, eight years after the Commission last reviewed possible new routes for its programme of long-distance routes. This new idea was for a route to link the Pennine Way with the Lake District, and, in fact, in 1968 consultations about the idea were held with<sup>1</sup> representatives of the Lake District Park Planning Board. The idea was developed by the Ramblers Association, and was to become the Dales Way. The suggestion was enthusiastically reported in the Times in an article headlined 'Stride Towards a Ramblers' Dream', which focussed on the fact that this could become the first riverside long-distance path.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1968 the Ramblers Association submitted a definite proposal to the West Riding County Council for a route which would run from industrial Yorkshire by way of the Pennine Way to Windermere. It seems that for the first time an amenity group sponsoring an idea was looking to a local authority rather than the Commission for help in creating a scheme. The way in which the Commission had been shelving new ideas for such a long time no doubt encouraged this and this would seem to be the first instance of what would become a major development in the history of long-distance paths in England during the 1970s -

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<sup>1</sup> NPC Eighteenth Report (1967), pp27-8.

<sup>2</sup> The Times 30th September 1968, p3a.



the development of such facilities by bodies other than the Commission.

Other potential routes which were mentioned in the Commission's Annual Report for 1968 included a Wolds Way and a bridleway linking Dartmoor and Exmoor, and preliminary negotiations had begun on these. A Cambrian Way through the heartland of Wales, a coastal path around Anglesey and one on the Isle of Wight were also mentioned as possible<sup>1</sup> future routes.

## 5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW LEGISLATION

### (a) Continuing Pressure for Change

Although long-distance routes can be examined more or less in isolation during this period, other developments were taking place which were to have a considerable impact on them.

In mid-1962, Sir Keith Joseph became Minister of Housing and Local Government and he seems to have influenced the Government by taking a personal interest in planning for recreation in the countryside, proposing that areas be set aside for intensive recreation near to the conurbations for example. Research into recreation was beginning in Great Britain, and the results of the comprehensive ORRRC study had attracted considerable attention, especially its proposals for a hierarchy of areas and facilities for recreation.

Nevertheless, in Great Britain thinking was still focussed on amending the 1949 Act and, following an important debate in the House of Commons,<sup>2</sup> instigated by Jeremy Thorpe on the subject of national parks, there seemed to be a good chance of legislation being introduced. Indeed, the Government had been committed to this for some time.

However, further consideration led to a questioning of the

<sup>1</sup> CC First Report (1968), p30.

<sup>2</sup> HC Reports 1962-63 vol 668 cols 811-890, 30th November 1962.



assumptions behind the Hobhouse Reports, on which the 1949 Act was based, particularly because circumstances had changed so much since the late-1940s with new and unforeseen pressures on the countryside. The idea of completely new legislation was thus raised, although it was then too late in the current Parliament for new or amending legislation to be introduced.

(b) The Countryside in 1970 Conferences

In 1963 the first conference of 'the Countryside in 1970' was held and, although this stemmed directly from the National Nature Week and was coordinated by the Nature Conservancy, wider issues than nature were considered. The conclusion was reached that a comprehensive review of the countryside was needed. The second, and main, conference was held in 1965, and a wide range of ideas for recreational provisions was put forward.

Tom Stephenson, who had opened a section of the first Conference on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism (and had lamented that long-distance paths were taking longer to create than motorways<sup>1</sup>) was in Study Group 5 of the 1965 Conference, reviewing the existing legislation. The Group's conclusions echoed some of the demands being put forward by the National Parks Commission, together with long-standing demands such as the clarification of the law on footpaths and completion of the statutory survey of footpaths. Long-distance paths were discussed, but their prominence was clearly less than it had been, for the area of consideration had been so much widened. All the ideas and demands were now in the context of a much wider approach to the planning of the countryside and a major conclusion of the Conference was that Countryside Commissions were needed with much wider powers<sup>2</sup> and interests than those of the National Parks Commission.

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Study Conference... ed. The Nature Conservancy, HMSO 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Countryside in 1970, Second Conference... RSA, 1966.

(c) The White Paper 'Leisure in the Countryside'  
and Changes in the Commission

Before the General Election of October, 1964, both main parties had pledged themselves to reform the legislation on recreation in the countryside. The Labour Party won the election and so returned to power after thirteen years in opposition. In November, 1964 the Government created a new Ministry of Land and Natural Resources which took responsibilities for the National Parks Commission (and for long-distance routes in England) and Fred Willey, 'the new Minister, continued the assessment of the need for legislation. In April 1965 he received a memorandum from Lord Strang entitled 'Leisure and Countryside Amenity' pressing for major administrative changes and the creation of 'recreation areas'.<sup>1</sup> Later in the year, Willey confirmed that a tidying-up Bill was no longer a possibility, and he added:

"Today we cannot rest content to repair the shortcomings of the 1949 Act. Today we need to look beyond the boundaries of National Parks; we need a more comprehensive and ambitious countryside policy."<sup>2</sup>

The Countryside in 1970 Conferences had proved influential and several major recommendations were included in a Government White Paper entitled Leisure in the Countryside (England and Wales)<sup>3</sup> published in February 1966. This set out the measures to be incorporated into new legislation, confirming that a new Countryside Commission would replace the National Parks Commission and would have responsibility for the whole of the countryside of England and Wales and not just national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Country Parks, intensively managed recreation areas, were to be the major innovation in the planning framework and the emphasis on bodies of water, picnic sites and other similar intensively used areas for

<sup>1</sup> NPC Sixteenth Report (1965), Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. Appendix F.

<sup>3</sup> Cmnd 2928.



recreation illustrated that the measure would be primarily oriented to mass recreation.

The new Commission was to become a much more professional body, more in keeping with the times, with much wider responsibilities. In fact, almost immediately the Ministry made radical changes in the membership of the National Parks Commission, effectively creating a new Commission in anticipation of the legislation. Lord Strang was replaced by Lady Wooton of Abinger, a former senior civil servant - and this appointment was not popular with the amenity groups. Furthermore, ten of the Commissioners were retired, several against<sup>1</sup> their will. The two that remained were joined by six new Commissioners and there were complaints from user groups that their interests were not adequately represented on the new Commission - a point raised in a Parliamentary question at the end of 1966.

Because of this and the other changes which were proposed, there was concern that national parks might be debased and that the limited resources would be moved away from them. A similar concern may have been felt for long-distance paths for, although they were recreational provisions, attention was now to be on less grand and more intensive schemes, and an intention of the changes seemed to be to make a clean break with the past. In addition, the removal of Ritchie, Pauline Dower and Brunston Yapp created a question as to whether the drive needed to make the very difficult programme for long-distance routes continue might be lost.

However, the White Paper had stressed that the Countryside Commission would be asked to give "a high priority to this work [on long-distance paths] and ensure that the long interval between the designation of a route and its opening for use [would be] reduced."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the short-term at least there seemed a good chance that

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Francis Ritchie, May 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Cmnd 2928 op.cit. p22.



long-distance routes might benefit from the revamping of the Commission, especially the changes in staffing levels. The Commission's staff increased in number from 34 in 1965 to 43 in 1966<sup>1</sup> and then to 64 in 1967, rising to 67 the following year,<sup>1</sup> and therefore almost doubling in three years. As has been noted, this enabled a<sup>2</sup> separate section for long-distance routes to be established in 1967.

(d) The Gosling Report

The White Paper also contained some important proposals for ordinary footpaths in the countryside, pressing for a completion of the definitive maps, proposing that country councils be given concurrent powers with district councils to create footpaths (something the Commission had pressed for strongly in the context of long-distance routes) and proposing legislation to simplify the law on footpaths.

However, while these ideas found favour with the amenity groups, the White Paper continued:

"But in the Government's view a more radical form may well be needed to provide a legislative framework which would permit the development of a system of footpaths and bridleways, some based on existing routes, but others newly created, which would be more suited to modern needs."<sup>3</sup>

This idea of a "carefully planned network" to be created by a "new administrative machinery" introduced a topic which was to be fiercely debated through the 1970s - footpath rationalisation; for the corollary of creating a new network was that some existing paths would close.

The White Paper was proposing some fairly radical changes and before legislation could be framed, a systematic review of matters relating to footpaths was clearly needed. Willey appointed a committee to do this under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Gosling, and the Gosling Committee began work in April 1967.

<sup>1</sup> CC Third Report (1970), p53.

<sup>2</sup> NPC Eighteenth Report (1967), p27.

<sup>3</sup> Cmnd 2928 op.cit., pp11-2.

The eleven-man Committee included a wide range of land and amenity interests. The YHA interest was represented by Gerald McGuire, the Commons Society interest by Ian Campbell and the interest of the Ramblers Association by Tom Stephenson, who was currently Chairman of the Central Rights of Way Committee which represented camping, trekking and hiking interests and other amenity groups.

The terms of reference of the Committee were:

"To consider how far the present system of footpaths, bridleways and other comparable rights of way in England and Wales and the arrangements for recording, closure, diversion, creation and maintenance of such routes are suitable for present and potential needs in the countryside, and to make recommendations."<sup>1</sup>

In practice, the Committee was hurried and had to make preliminary recommendations to the Ministry at an early stage, it having been decided to deal with footpaths in the Countryside Bill, which was introduced in November 1967.

Nevertheless, no fewer than 75 organisations submitted evidence, together with a large number of individuals and some Government departments, and the Committee's report, published in March 1968, was a wide-ranging review of footpaths and footpath law. Twenty-one recommendations were made, although the Report was clearly a compromise between the land interests and the representatives of the user groups. Touchy issues such as bulls in fields with footpaths and the ploughing of paths were examined and changes were recommended, but in general the stress was on the simplification of the law and procedures dealing with footpaths, and the removal of obvious anomalies, which land-owners often wanted just as much as the amenity groups. For the same reasons, a recommendation was made to make footpaths "less of a Cinderella among the cares of local authorities."<sup>2</sup>

Other recommendations included the compulsory signposting of

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Footpath Committee ('The Gosling Report') Ministry of Housing and Local Government/Welsh Office, 1968, pl.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p7.



footpaths, powers to enable local authorities to create paths for limited periods and changes in the law to allow cyclists to use pathways.

Arguably, the most important statement was one contrary to the Government's ideas on the rationalisation of footpaths:

"We approach the suggestion of a "system" and a "carefully-planned network" [of paths] with great caution because much of the value and charm of footpaths lies in their waywardness."<sup>1</sup>

Presumably both sides felt that they were likely to find themselves in a worse situation than at present if legislation promoted rationalisation.

Just one paragraph of the Report dealt specifically with long-distance routes and the hope was expressed that "in the climate of intentions created by the Countryside Bill it will be possible to complete these negotiations (to implement routes) more quickly."<sup>2</sup> A specific recommendation was made that the Commission should be empowered to apply for creation orders along long-distance routes, although nothing came of this. Other changes which would affect long-distance routes related to proposed changes in footpath law and, in particular, the vesting of responsibilities for the creation of new paths with the county councils.

Of the submissions made to the Gosling committee, that from the National Parks Commission concerning long-distance routes is of considerable interest for it illustrated that the idea was being developed to fit with the proposed changes in scale and purpose for planning for recreation in the countryside.<sup>3</sup> The Commission put forward the idea of extending the concept to cover "regional pathways" and systems of pathways around cities; that is, routes of more regional than national significance. The memorandum proposed that financial and procedural help should be given to local authorities to

<sup>1</sup> ibid. p3.

<sup>2</sup> ibid. p10.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum reproduced in NPC Eighteenth Report (1967), p75.



take the initiative and collaborate in this and a grant of 75% was suggested, to be payable on the Commission's recommendation. The framework for creating these would be different to that for creating official long-distance routes, partly to avoid the delays and frustrations experienced with the latter, and partly to retain the special 'national' status of the statutory long-distance paths. The memorandum went on to reveal that many of the examples the Commission had in mind had been proposed as long-distance routes but had been ruled to be too short or of insufficient scenic quality to be pursued by the Commission. In particular, a number of canal towpaths and disused railway lines were cited. Further examples were in areas where there was a strong potential for use by a regional population - the suggested Anglesey Coast Path and paths along the Cotswolds and the Shropshire Hills were given as examples of these:

"What we are looking for is the provision of continuous routes, deliberately planned to take in features of scenic and other interest in a form which will be convenient for visitors. The selection, marking and maintenance of such routes, whether linear or circular or in other forms better adopted to the terrain, would, we feel, enhance the recreational value of the areas concerned."<sup>1</sup>

In addition, networks around cities, including green-belt routes, circular paths (up to ten miles - 16 km) from access points to view points or places of historic or scenic interest, and radial paths from city centres - including 'feeders' to the official long-distance routes, were proposed for inclusion in the system. The Wirral Way (in Cheshire) was cited as an example of the sort of route the Commission had in mind, and it was stated that the purpose of such routes would be to cater for the less-energetic family-type outing.

However, the Gosling Committee made no reference to such a system in its Report, perhaps because it was felt that such an extension to the planning framework could lead to widespread rationalisation, and

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p76.

the Commission expressed disappointment that its ideas had been omitted from both the Gosling Report and the Countryside Bill. Nevertheless, it was able to comment: "Bearing in mind our widening responsibilities under the 1968 Act we intend .... to elaborate and pursue our ideas on these topics."<sup>1</sup>

(e) The Countryside Act

Gordon Cherry has traced the development of the Countryside Bill<sup>2</sup> which was introduced into the House of Commons in November 1967<sup>3</sup> by the new Minister of Housing and Local Government, Anthony Greenwood (the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources having been disbanded in February 1967 after a life of just over two years). Relatively little was of direct relevance to long-distance paths and most of the content of the Bill was taken from the Government's White Paper. In fact, the Government seems to have been uncertain whether to include matters relating to footpaths in the measure or to wait until the Gosling Committee reported, and in the event a compromise seems to have been reached whereby a few matters pertaining to footpaths were incorporated into the Bill. The two main changes that there were concerned the creation and closure of paths, with counties being given powers to act concurrently with the district councils, and the sign-posting of footpaths, a long-standing objective of groups like the Commons Society and latterly the Ramblers Association. This was made a duty of the highway authorities.

The Second Reading of the Bill took place on November 10th 1967, and Carol Johnson expressed concern about the rate of closure of footpaths. He continued that:

"an even more important question is the provision of long-distance footpaths. That is a very unhappy story. The high hopes which were held out as a result of the 1949 Act have not materialised."<sup>4</sup>

However, whereas previously suggestions for amending the legislation

<sup>1</sup> CC First Report (1968), p30.

<sup>2</sup> Cherry op.cit. chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> HC Reports 1967-68 Session Bill 1.

<sup>4</sup> HC Reports 1967-68 vol 753 col 1454.



had contained specific points relating to the improvement of procedures for creating long-distance paths, nothing was forthcoming in the Bill or during its passage through Parliament.

In the Committee stage in the House of Commons Arnold Gregory introduced an interesting amendment, to create "long-distance water routes". However the Government felt that there would be too many problems in implementing the idea - and that it would be more a concern of the navigation authorities than the planning authorities.<sup>1</sup>

When the Bill passed to the House of Lords, the improved standing of the cycling lobby was evident. Lord Brooke of Cumnor successfully introduced an amendment at the Report stage, which had in fact been debated in the House of Commons and had attracted much attention in the Times, to allow cycles on bridleways and a further successful amendment of his changed the 1949 Act to allow cyclists to use long-distance routes.<sup>2</sup> In moving this Lord Brooke claimed to have the support of the YHA. On the other hand he attempted in vain to introduce powers to allow wardens to operate with a land-owner's consent on footpaths,<sup>3</sup> a long-standing request of the National Parks Commission and one which may have made the creation of long-distance routes easier had it been implemented, with land-owners feeling they could get more protection if a warden service operated over paths across their land.

The Lords returned their amendments to the House of Commons in May 1968 and a disagreement occurred between the two Houses. The Lords had passed an amendment changing the title of the Countryside Commission to the Countryside and National Park Commission, a move much supported by amenity groups which felt this may have led to greater protection for the national parks. However, the Commons

<sup>1</sup> HC Reports 1967-68 Standing Committee A, cols 943-9.

<sup>2</sup> HL Reports 1967-68 vol 292 cols 545-6 & 573-4, 20th May 1968.

<sup>3</sup> ibid. col 579.



appointed a Committee to give its reasons for disagreement to the Lords, that the Lords' title was too cumbersome and the Lords conceded this.

The Countryside Act received the Royal Assent on July 3rd 1968 and came into force a month later. It replaced the National Parks Commission after a life of almost nineteen years and transferred unchanged the responsibilities and powers for planning long-distance routes to the new Countryside Commission.

#### 6. CONCLUSION OF THE FINAL PART OF THE COMMISSION'S LIFE

The programme for long-distance routes during the final period of the life of the National Parks Commission carried on without major changes in approach, in that the Commission continued to become more and more involved in extra statutory negotiations both before and after the Reporting stage, necessitating the continuing restriction on the number of potential paths being examined. There were two significant events. The first was the completion and opening of the Pennine Way, which generated considerable interest and publicity from many different quarters, but also resulted in a further increase in the Commission's workload through the demands of management and promotion which it took upon itself to co-ordinate. The second was that at the end of the period there was a major increase in the number of staff the Commission was allowed, enabling a separate section to be established which would deal exclusively with long-distance routes.

The increase in staff was in response to major changes in attitude to the planning of recreation in the countryside and represented a move in anticipation of legislation which would revamp the Commission and widen its responsibilities. However, it also resulted in the

removal from the Commission of long-standing Commissioners who were known to have worked hard to promote long-distance routes. The deliberations of the mid-1960s which culminated in the 1968 Countryside Act were potentially of considerable importance to the development of long-distance paths, threatening a possible reduction in their importance as emphasis shifted from the grand schemes to small, intensive recreational developments. However, the increasing interest in long-distance routes and their publicity - with the Pennine Way once more prominent - led to their retaining a special place in the planning framework.